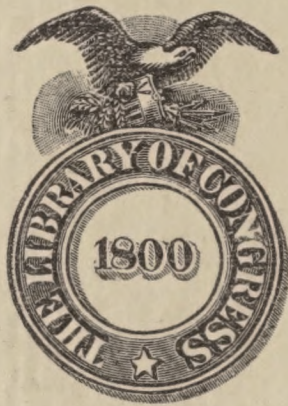


VICTOR ST. CLAIR



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"Guess yeou air mistook in yeour man this time, mister."

(Page 12)

George W. Browne

BREAK O' DAY BOYS OR RAGGED BOB'S YOUNG REPUBLIC

BY
VICTOR ST. CLAIR

ILLUSTRATED

"Here's a hand to the boy who has courage
To do what he knows to be right.
When he falls in the way of temptation
He has a hard battle to fight.
Who strives against self and his comrades
Will find a most powerful foe.
All honor to him if he conquers,
A cheer to the boy who does so."

—*Phæbe Cary.*

AKRON, OHIO
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PREFACE.

About twenty years ago I had occasion to find my way into that lonely and isolated district known then by the name of "Break o' Day." It was late in the afternoon when I had completed my steady six-mile ascent through an unbroken forest on foot, and with every prospect of a rainy night, the scene which met my gaze at the summit was the most dreary landscape I ever saw. It had been recently inhabited, if such a life deserves this dignity, by a party of coal-burners, who had quickly departed with the felling of the last of the growth of trees. The dozen or more of sod cabins that they had occupied during their transient stay in this region were already falling to decay, except one that still gave shelter to the last of these poor people, himself too poor or lazy to get away.

Through a rift in the bushes I discovered the weather-beaten walls of the only frame dwelling within many miles of the spot, owned and occupied at that time by a man and woman who were outcasts of good society. Despite this fact, of which I had been forewarned, under the circumstances, I was glad to seek shelter here in the old red house reputed to be haunted. Upon reaching the old building, which did not improve in appearance upon closer inspection, I knocked loudly at the front door for admission, stepping back as I did for fear it would fall upon me. Repeating my summons and getting no response, I walked around to the other side, thinking my thumping had not been heard. The rear door was open, but I could hear no one moving about inside, while no one came to meet me. Concluding that the people must be away from home, and that I would have to look elsewhere, I turned away, though I did return to the front door, pounding louder than before for some one to reply. But my demands met with no kind of a response, and I gave up. Then the picture of utter loneliness presented by the surrounding country, and the gloom of the setting sun sinking behind a mass of inky-black clouds, caused me to go back to the rear door once more before seeking the shelter of the sod-cabin in plain sight on the hillside.

I was passing around the corner of the house again, when I was startled to find myself suddenly and unexpectedly confronted by what seemed to be a living prototype of that un-

canny being which had been described to me in my youth as the "witch of Endor." Her shrill voice pitched to a high key, she fairly screamed in my ear:

"Hi! ye go one way; I go t'other!"

I soon learned that while I had been making my way back and forth at the east end of the house, she had been performing a corresponding series of journeys at the other end, the front door not being so it could be opened. Upon telling her that I was seeking a night's lodging, she replied brusquely:

"Dunno! 't 'll be 's th' ol' man says. He's up to th' barn."

Thither I started, but was saved a part of the distance by soon coming in sight of a large, slip-shod figure perched on a high stone wall, with arms bent over a pair of sharp knees, and a pair of huge bare feet upturned so as to nearly conceal the big, shaggy head in the background. This "son of the soil" seemed to be fully engaged in watching the gyrations of the big toes and the approach of the distant thunder-cloud, which was not darker than the great organs of locomotion standing out there in the gathering shades of night, as they appear to me now, like the wings of a monstrous bat. In answer to my question he replied in almost the same words I had just heard:

"Dunno! 't 'll be jess 's th' ol' woman says."

So it was settled, and I passed under that shaky old roof a more comfortable night than I had expected. In the morning, which came as clear and beautiful as that which dawned upon the forlorn colonists of the sod-cabins, as described farther on, I gladly bade my host and hostess what was to prove my farewell.

A more recent visit, after the passage of many years, was made to Break o' Day behind a pair of light-footed horses, that did not seem to mind the tedious climb to the summit, when a beautiful and remarkable transformation in the scene from that I had last known burst upon my vision. Where before had been acres of waste land, covered with a dense shrubbery, were now cultivated fields and gardens; the collection of rude sod-cabins of the coal-burners had disappeared and in their places stood the substantial and comfortable houses of a prosperous community; the darkness and desolation which had then existed had faded away before life and activity, comfort and happiness, peace and prosperity, for during the interval between my visits to this site, now known by the happier title of "Mount Delight," had been founded under such adverse circumstances as must have disheartened a less courageous founder of RAGGED ROB'S YOUNG REPUBLIC.

VICTOR ST. CLAIR.

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BREAK O' DAY BOYS

CHAPTER I.

THE BOOTBLACK, THE COUNTRYMAN, AND THE CITY
KNAVES.

“I snum! I e’enamos’ feel’s if I was lost, though there do seem to be plenty o’ folks ’round.”

“Black yer boots and make ’em shine; only cost yer half a dime!” cried a cheery voice at the speaker’s elbow, and, looking down, the tall man was surprised to see a specimen of boyhood quite unknown to him. The features were regular enough, and would have been quite handsome had it not been for big patches of shoe blacking smeared over cheek and brow. Blue eyes peered out from the dark stains around them with a roguish twinkle, and there was a certain fearless independence in his looks and attitude which could not fail to show the most casual observer

the fearlessness and self-reliance of his nature. It was his clothes, his general deportment, the air of cool contempt for everything and everybody around him which caused the stranger fresh from the country to stare upon the boot-black of the great city with speechless wonder.

“When yer eyes git tired o’ looking, mister, perhaps ye’ll give yer tongue a chance,” said the young knight of the blacking brush, beginning to remove from his shoulder the everhandy kit of his trade. “Better hev yer brogans shined up, mister; they need it bad.”

The reply of the man showed that something of greater moment to him at that time than his personal appearance was uppermost in his mind.

“Say, bub, can yeou tell me where there’s a good tavern that a chap could stop at till to-morrow?”

“Sold ag’in, Ragged Rob!” cried one of half a dozen companions of his ilk, who had quickly appeared upon the scene from all quarters. “When ye git through with th’ old hayseed, s’posin’ ye got er job, ye might as well go out o’ bizness, fer ye won’t hev blackin’ ’nough left

to tip a gent's boot. So long," and the crowd began to beat a hasty retreat to look for work in a more favorable direction.

"Get a move on you, old mossback, or the cops'll haul you in for obstructing the sidewalks!" muttered a beetle-browed passer-by, who emphasized his words with a push which nearly sent the countryman reeling into the gutter.

"Geewhillikins, heow th' folks do crowd! Beats all natur'. What's thet yeou say, bub?"

"I say ye might find sich a stable as ye want by lookin' in th' right hand corner. Luck to ye anyway," and the bootblack was speedily lost in the crowd.

"Drat th' leetle feller's pictur'! If I had my thumb an' finger on him I'd pinch his throat for answerin' a civil question in that uncivil way."

"What's that you said, friend?" asked a man who had come hurrying toward him from out of the throng of people passing to and fro. "Why, can this be possible?" continued the newcomer, slapping him on the shoulder in a familiar manner. "By jove! this is the pleasantest

surprise of my life. Have you just come to New York, Mr. Reyburnbrook?"

By this time the man from the country was able to get a fair view of the speaker, who was a tall, genteel, well-dressed person of middle life, and he said:

"Guess yeou air mistook in yeour man this time, mister. I ain't no sich name as Bumbrook at all. I'm jess plain Elihu Cornhill, deacon o' th' church at Basinburg, where I wish I was this blessed minnit. Th' things an' folks air so tar-nal thick round here one can't draw a long breath, an'—"

"Excuse me, Deacon Cornhill," interrupted the other. "I can see my mistake now, and I offer a thousand apologies for troubling you. Do you know you look as near like a friend of mine as a pea in the same pod. Good day."

"It's funny queer," exclaimed the bewildered Deacon Cornhill, "folks air in sich a pesky hurry they can't stop to put one on his right track. I s'pose I must keep joggin', 's if I was over in th' back lot lookin' fer th' caows."

Meanwhile, the man who had left him so

abruptly after accosting him, had sought another person a short distance away, and who had evidently been waiting for him. Together the couple hastily examined a condensed New England directory, which the former produced from his pocket. After a hurried consultation, they separated, one going at right angles to the street followed by the unsuspecting countryman, while the other gave him pursuit.

Finding that the crowd of passers-by jostled him, making his advance somewhat difficult, as he hastened on his way, Deacon Cornhill gathered his huge gripsack close up under his right arm, pulled his hat down firmly upon his large head, and kept stubbornly on his way, regardless of the elbowing and pushing of others, saying under his breath:

“Puts me in mind o’ goin’ through ’Squire Danvers’ bush lot, but I calc’late I can stand it if they can.”

He soon reached a corner where, if the pedestrians were less numerous, he was more than ever perplexed over the course for him to follow. On every hand the tumult of street traffic

and the noise and confusion of city life bewildered him. As he stood there for a moment, looking anxiously about him, the sound of loud, angry voices arrested his attention, when he saw a party of small boys disputing and wrangling over some mooted question. Then one of the group broke suddenly away from the others and fled, with two in furious pursuit. Looking back over his shoulder as he ran the fugitive did not seem to pay any heed to the course he was taking, and in spite of the deacon's warning he struck him with such force that the startled man was hurled upon the sidewalk. The boy fell on top of him, and the next moment the foremost of his pursuers cried:

“I’ve got ye, Slimmy! Say ye lied, or I’ll knock th’ teeth out ’n yer jaw!”

“Not fer Joe!” retorted the doughty fugitive, regaining his feet to be pulled back upon the ground the following instant.

“Won’t, won’t ye, ye sneak-eyed—oh, I’ll wallop it inter—”

He had begun to pommel his victim unmercifully, while his companions urged him on with

words of encouragement. This was more than kind-hearted Deacon Cornhill, who had regained his feet, could witness without interfering, and, dropping his gripsack on the sidewalk, in order to have his hands free, he went to the rescue of the smaller boy, exclaiming:

“Let him alone, yeou ragmuffin!” trying at the same time to catch the aggressive youngster by the collar. But the boy easily slipped from his grasp, and ran down a cross street, followed by his friends, the party giving utterance to peals of laughter. In his great indignation, Deacon Cornhill started to give them chase, but after going a few steps thought better of his foolishness and turned back. He was just in season to see the boy he had been defending dodging around the corner with his gripsack!

“Here, stop, yeou thief! Catch him, somebody; he’s makin’ off with my satchel,” giving the young thief pursuit as he uttered his frantic cries.

The light-footed boy quickly disappeared around a street corner, and when the irate deacon reached the place he was not to be seen. He

had now left the main street, so that but a few people were in sight, no one of these paying any heed to his distracted cries.

“Oh, Lord! what shall I do? All my spare clothes, my shirt, an' a good hunk o' th' church money gone! What will th' folks say? What shall I do?”

Bewildered and disheartened, the strong man stood trembling from head to foot while he wept like a child, as a stranger stepped in front of him, saying in a free and easy manner, while he laid a hand on his shoulder:

“Hilloa, deacon! You are the last man I should have expected to meet, and here I find you in the heart of the big city. What can you be doing here? I do not see that you have aged a bit since I saw you at your home in Basinburg four years ago. Four years did I say? Bless me if it hasn't been seven, or will be the coming summer. How is your good wife, and all the folks about the good old town?”

Then, seeing the look of blank astonishment on the other's florid countenance, he rattled on in a different strain:

“Is it possible you do not remember me, Deacon Cornhill? It would be perfectly natural if you didn't, seeing I have changed considerable since we last met. Knocking about the world, my good deacon, does put age-lines on one's face, let them differ who will. Let me refresh a memory which is seldom at fault. Remember Harry Sawyer, a nephew of your town clerk, John Sawyer, who has held the office so many years? Recall the scapegrace? I am glad he has improved with age. Recollect the race we had one afternoon running after the steers that tore down the fence and plundered a neighbor's cornfield? I finally caught one of the rampant creatures, after the rest of you had cornered him. He ripped my coat from hem to collar, and I barely escaped being gored to death. That catches your memory? Such little incidents often live longer in one's mind than affairs of greater moment, but which somehow slipped away with the years. It does me good to grasp the horny hand of an honest man. Do not be afraid of mine suffering; if it is soft, it is tough.”

CHAPTER II.

A BOY TO THE RESCUE.

While the voluble stranger who had introduced himself as "Harry Sawyer," kept up his incessant flow of language, Deacon Cornhill was speechless. He saw that the speaker was a well-dressed young man, and, if his memory was at a loss to account for much that he said, the other's professed friendship instantly won his confidence, which was the easier obtained owing to his recent trouble.

"I have been robbed!" he exclaimed. "I had money in my satchel, and a parcel o' boys come along an' one o' 'em stole my money, my clothes an'—"

"Stole your money?" fairly gasped the other, in genuine concern. "Tell me about it—quick, before it is too late to recover it."

In a somewhat disjointed way Deacon Cornhill explained how he had found a party of boys in the midst of quarrel, how he had tried to help one who seemed to be the victim of the others, and how the very one he had tried to succor had stolen his property before his eyes.

“It was a sham fight—a dodge of those contemptible youngsters to throw you off of your guard. And you were fool enough to let them accomplish their purpose!” turning to leave the unfortunate countryman in undisguised disgust.

“Don’t leave me here alone, mister—Mister Sawyer. They didn’t git all my money, but my shirt and my—”

“Then you have some of your money left?” catching him by the arm with a hold which made the strong man wince. “How much did the rapscallions leave?”

“Ninety dollars.”

“How much did they get?”

“Thirty dollars. Yeou’re hurtin’ my arm like time, mister, th’ way yeou grip.”

“Excuse me, deacon; I was so excited over your loss that I forgot myself. But go on. You have ninety dollars left?”

“Jess that, 'cordin' to my an' Mandy's count afore I left home. Yeou see I come down here to buy for our sunday school library some books, an' I was to git some new things fer Mandy, an' she and me 'lowed it'd be better to keep the money in separate places, though I was shallow enough to put ten o' th' church money in my satchel. Yeou see my wallet was that crowded I couldn't do much different. Now that has gone, with Mandy's new things and my shirt and—”

“Let me tell you, deacon, you were fortunate to save as much as you have. Always carry your money in your pocket.”

“We must find th' pesky boys afore they hev time to spend it,” declared the deacon, whose countenance brightened somewhat at the stranger's words.

“It would be as well to look for a needle in a haystack, deacon, as to look for a boy in New York; especially if that boy happens to be a

thief, as most of them are. But come with me, Deacon Cornhill, and to-morrow I will see what can be done."

"Do yeou think yeou can git my money back, and my shirt—"

"Quite sure of it, deacon. I will put half a dozen detectives on their tracks, who will run them to earth as so many hounds would some foxes. I don't like to mention such personal matters, but it was lucky for you I came along as I did."

"I know it, I know it," replied the other, who was in better spirits now he felt there was a prospect of getting his gripsack, with its contents, again into his possession. "To think 'em boys should hev played sich a mean trick on me."

"Learned their trade young, deacon. Come with me to-night. Nothing can be gained by following, or rather trying to follow, those slippery young thieves. The police will know just where to look for them."

Keeping up a continual flow of words, he who called himself Harry Sawyer led the way along

street after street, each one as they advanced seeming to grow more narrow and crooked. Bewildered as he was by his adventures, Deacon Cornhill finally became aware of this. There was an unfavorable appearance about everything he saw, and he began to feel there was something wrong.

“Hold on, mister—I have forgotten yeour name—air yeou sure yeou’re on th’ right road? This looks pesky narrer and’—”

In the midst of his speech he saw another man come swiftly out of the dark alley on his left, and he caught sight of a goblet flying toward him. Then the missile struck him on the side of his head, and he fell to the pavement with a low moan of pain.

“Well done, Bill,” declared Sawyer to the new-comer. “Now I will pull the old sheep’s wool in a trice, after which we must run down the precocious youngsters who have cheated us of a good share of our goods.”

The process of “pulling the old sheep’s wool” was evidently the stealing of the unconscious man’s pocket-book, for the speaker began to

rifle him of whatever he carried of value. But he was interrupted in a most unexpected manner. At the very moment his fingers closed on the well-filled wallet, an agile figure bounded out of the shadows of the alley, striking the stooping form of the robber with such force as to send him headlong into the gutter, the newcomer crying at the same time:

“The cop! The cop!”

This so startled the second ruffian that he turned and fled, and his accomplice scrambled to his feet in season to see the boy, who had given him such a blow, seize the plethoric pocket-book and disappear around a corner.

“Stop thief!” cried the would-be robber. “Bill, where are you? Stop the youngster!”

The twain then gave furious pursuit.

While this chase was taking place, a passer-by was attracted by the prostrate figure of Deacon Cornhill, and thinking murder had been committed, he was about to give an alarm, when a voice at his elbow said:

“Don't stir a noise, Jim.”

Looking abruptly around the man saw with

surprise the young bootblack, whom Deacon Cornhill had met at the out-set of his troubles, and who was none other than the boy who had snatched the pocket-book away from the thief. He had found little difficulty in eluding his pursuers.

“’Twon’t do any good to get a mob here. I’ll look after the old gent, if you’ll help me git him to Brattle’s.”

“This you, Rob?”

“I reckon, Jim. Does the old gent show any signs of picking up the leetle sense he had?” and depositing his kit of tools beside the other’s gripsack on the sidewalk, he looked closely into his face.

“’Twas a hard blow the sand-bagger give him. I could not have got here—hillo! he’s starting his breathing machine. He’s soon going to get on his feet. So’ll the mob soon begin to corner here. Lend a hand, Jim, we’ll see if we can get him away.”

Excited spectators were already beginning to gather about the spot, and the unfortunate man beginning to open his eyes, his friends raised

him to an upright position, where, by their aid, he was able to remain.

“Mandy, where air you?” he asked, putting out his hands. “I vum! I b’lieve I’m lost!”

“Lean on me, old gent,” said the boy, “and you’ll soon be where ye can ask as many questions as ye want to. Just now the least said the less there’ll be to fergit. I wouldn’t advise you to call all New York together just to see what a simpleton you can be when you set out. Easy on his collar, Jim; lean on me, old gent, as much as you want.”

“My money!” exclaimed the bewildered man, now recalling his loss.

“If it’s in your wallet it’s safe, for I’ve got that and your handbag safe and sound.”

Deacon Cornhill uttered a low thanksgiving, and assisted by the two he moved slowly down the street, until they came to a cheap lodging house, with the single word over the weather-beaten door:

“BRATTLE.”

The entrance was about three feet below the sidewalk, and as they descended the old steps

they trembled beneath their united weight. At their foot Rob opened a door in keeping with its rusty surroundings, and the three entered a dingy, low-walled apartment, with a desk at the further end and a row of seats around the walls.

"You can go now, Jim," said the young boot-black.

"That you, Little Hickory?" asked a man behind the desk, leaving his high stool and coming out into the middle of the floor.

"I leave it with you to say, Brattle. A body, as far as I know, is not obliged to carry an introduce card pasted to his collar. I can take care of the old gent, thank you."

"Been drinking, eh?" asked Brattle.

"Now you insult a good man, Brattle. He's got a clip on the side of the head from some sand-baggers, that's all. He's coming round as slick as a button. You can tip over on the bench, old gent, if you want."

Deacon Cornhill rallied enough to ask again about his money, when Rob replied:

"What I said you can bank on, as the big boodlers say. I reckon you don't remember me,

so I must introduce myself. I'm the chap who asked to black your boots a spell ago, and I'm variously called. Sometimes it's plain 'Rob,' and sometimes gents put the frills on by calling me 'Ragged Rob.' Some calls me 'Little Hickory,' and some dub me 'Snowball,' and others 'Blackball,' and I leave it to you which is nighest right. But that don't count here now, and you can pay your money and take your choice. Mebbe I didn't answer you as I oughter, when you axed me for a place to hang your hat for the night. But your boots did need shining and trimming the wuss kind, and I set you down as a stingy old duffer from Wayback, who didn't know what made a gentleman. Then, when you had gone, and I took 'count of stock and balanced up what a lamb you'd be for the wolves, and seeing one of the critters following you I tuk your tracks too. I got erlong in season to see the kids make off with your grip, when I took arter 'em tooth and nail. With some lively ~~sprinting~~, and a bit of scrimmage, I got your old gripsack out'n Sodom, when I pegged back on your track ag'in. I didn't get erlong in season to save you that

clip on the head, but I did get there in time to play the thief myself. I led 'em chaps a wild race, and here I am with the hull establishment, connected, wired and running in tip-top shape."

As the youth, who could not have been more than seventeen, despite his daring feats, had finished his rather lengthy explanation, he handed Deacon Cornhill his pocket-book and pushed his gripsack over by his side.

CHAPTER III.

AN ASTOUNDING PROPOSITION.

Deacon Cornhill listened with unfeigned amazement to the rapid account of his young benefactor until he had concluded, when he managed to say:

“I don’t know what is proper to say to yeou, bub. Yeou’ve done me a sarvice I shall never forgit, if I live to be as old as Methusaleh; I shan’t, I vum, I shan’t. I want to pay yeou for it. Who’d thought ’em slick seemin’ men were sich cut-throats?”

“Black yer boots an’ make ’em shine? I ain’t no time to waste in perlaver. They need it. Time’s money, and bizness must be ’tended to afore pleasure.”

“Go ahead,” consented the deacon, putting out his right foot for the bootblack to begin work. Then, as the boy went about his task in

a manner which showed that he had thoroughly mastered it, he asked:

“What'd yeou say your name was?”

“Poor memory,” said the other, as he spat on the blacking and then began to rub vigorously. “You may call me Little Hickory.”

“Yeou don't say. Can't be yeour regular Scripture name?”

“'Bout as near as any I've got, Deacon Cornhill.”

“Bless me, how did yeou know my name?”

“Overheard you give it to the sharper. Oh, my! ain't yer underpinners in bad shape. Can't get a Broadway shine on 'em to save my reputation.”

“Yeou ain't told me yeour name yet,” persisted Deacon Cornhill, who had taken a strong liking for the strange youth. “And why do yeou call yeourself old? It's a sin an' a shame, o' which yeou must repent sometime in sack cloth an' ashes.”

“I know as leetle of your sack cloth and ashes, mister, as you know of me. Reckon I was older when I was born than many are when they die.

I thought it proper for to give you th' name that b'longs to me where you found me. Mother calls me Rob."

"That sounds more Christian like. Robert is a good old family name. What name did yeour father hev?"

"I couldn't begin to tell 'em, mister—I mean, deacon. I reckon he's had a good round dozen, first and last."

"Sho! but yeou don't mean it. Where is he?"

"Dunno."

"What! don't know where yeour father is? How long hev yeou lived this harum-scarum life?"

"As long as I can remember, and I rackon 'bout three years longer. Push out that foot a leetle further."

"And yeou like it?"

"Don't know any other, deacon."

The good man from Basinburg groaned, saying after a minute:

"It's too bad—too bad! Yeou seem like a proper sort o' a boy, an' with th' right kind of management might be somebody."

“I shouldn’t want to bank on your judgment, squire, I mean deacon, seeing the way you let ’em sharpers pull the wool over your eyes.”

Deacon Cornhill relapsed into silence, while he watched the swift, dexterous movements of the cheerful bootblack, who began to sing a snatch of song. He was one of those broad-minded, whole-souled men who never see another in lowly circumstances without wanting to lift him up. The frank honesty of Little Hickory, as the boy persisted in being known, had won his confidence, and to have done that was to insure a friendship not to be swerved from its purpose. A new light came over his florid countenance, as he pondered, until, forgetting him at his work, he sprang suddenly to his feet, exclaiming:

“I’ll do it!”

Though taken completely by surprise at this frantic action, Rob caught him by the wrist, and with a strength one would not have looked for in the youthful arm, he flung him back upon the bench, crying sharply:

“No, ye don’t till I git that other schooner

into trim. You'd look well, wouldn't ou, with 'em in sich shape?"

"Forgive me, my son."

"My son! Forsooth, as the play actor says. None of your softsolder on me. All I ask is for ye to keep still till I can put the polish on this other brogan."

It is needless to say that Deacon Cornhill obeyed, and not until the young workman was done did he say:

"I don't exactly git th' hang o' yeou, my dear boy—"

"Hold right on there, deacon. If you hev got anything to say to me, leave off the finery, and cut the garment plain. I ain't much on soap, but I'm honest clear through. Go ahead with your tongue motions, if you begin to see the track."

"Rob," resumed the other, recalling the fact that the boy had given at least so much of his name, "I ain't goin' to perlaver either. I want yeou to go hum with me."

Little Hickory showed his surprise without speaking.

“I’m in dead ’arnest. Mandy an’ I hev talked this over time an’ ag’in. We ain’t got chick nor child, an’ she was sayin’ only yesterday how cheerin’ it would be to hev a boy ’bout th’ house. I ain’t rich as some air, but I’m comfortably fixed, an’ what I’ve got shall be yeours, as soon as I’m through with it. Yeou shall hev my name, too, an’ be Elihu Cornhill, Jr.”

Rob still was too much surprised to speak, which allowed Deacon Cornhill to continue:

“It would be th’ makin’ o’ yeou, Robert. It would get yeou away from th’ wickedness o’ this sinful city, an’—”

“And away from my bizness.”

“Luddy me! yeou don’t call this blackin’ folks’ shoes an’ boots bizness!”

“I get a living by it, sir,” said the youthful speaker, with a pride one in better circumstances might have failed to display.

“But yeou would make a better an’ more honorable—”

“Hold right on, Deacon Cornhill. I reckon honesty is honorable anywhere. I should be like a fish out’n water up there in yer wilderness.”

“But out o’ this wilderness o’ wickedness. There yeou could go to Sunday school, an’ be up in society. Yeou hev got the makin’ o’ a smart boy in yeou. Yeou hev done me a great help, an’ I’ve taken a fancy to yeou. I’ll get yeou a new suit o’ clothes, an’ yeou’ll look as slick as a mouse. Then, as soon as I can finish my bizness, we’ll go hum an’ s’prise Mandy. Hum! how does that sound to yeou, Robert?”

If at first Little Hickory had thought that Deacon Cornhill was not in earnest, he could see now that he was thoroughly determined in what he said. But he had no idea of accepting an offer made with so much abruptness, so he said:

“If I could leave my bizness. which I ain’t owned up to yet, I couldn’t leave my mother.”

Deacon Cornhill showed by his looks that this was a contingency he had not taken into account.

“So yeour mother is livin’, Robert?”

“She was when I left home this morning.”

“She can come along, too. She’ll be help for Mandy. I vow, it’ll be all the better for yeou to hev her with us.”

“And my friends?” asked Rob, showing by his manner that he was becoming interested. “I hev ’em as I can’t leave.”

Before Deacon Cornhill could reply, the sound of many feet was heard entering the place, and a body of men quickly appeared on the scene. The foremost was a burly, bewhiskered fellow, who at sight of our couple cried exultantly:

“Here he is, boys! Nab him.”

CHAPTER IV.

A BOLD STAND.

At sight of the crowd Deacon Cornhill uttered a cry of fear, and looked hurriedly about for some way of escape. But the room had only one door opening on the street, and that was now blocked by the incoming men, the leader of whom showed a bright button on his coat, while he exhibited a warlike spirit that to an outsider should have aroused feeling of exaggeration as much as fear.

The owner of the place, however, showed only the latter sentiment, as, with a cry of terror, he ducked his head down behind the counter, while the clinking of breaking glass followed his disappearance, a big pitcher having been upset and sent rolling to the floor.

“Who are you looking for, Whalen?”

“That chap behind ye.”

“Name him and ye may have him, but not till ye do,” retorted the bootblack, falling into the language of the uneducated as he boldly met the gaze of the officer.

“I reckon names don’t matter when we’ve run er covey down.”

“It does in this case. This ain’t the man ye are after, Whalen!”

“What d’ye know erbout him, Hickory?”

“All there is to know, Whalen. Can’t ye see this is a hayseed from the country? Your man is a thoroughbred. Oh, I know who ye are after.”

“I reckon a man’s a man,” muttered the officer, who appeared as if he had seen his mistake, but disliked to own up to it.

“Half an hour ago your man was steering toward the Point, Whalen. ’Pears to me, with sich a reward at stake, I wouldn’t lose any more time with sich an old duffer as this covey, who won’t be worth a cent to ye when ye hev run him in.”

Whalen could see the truth of this statement,

and he cleared his way for getting out by saying:

“Ye ain’t giving me er blind, Hickory?”

“No, Whalen. And I advise ye to get onto the track while the scent is fresh.”

Without another word the officer turned about, and, still followed by his crowd, left the saloon.

Deacon Cornhill stood staring after the departing officer and his men for some time in silence, while Rob resumed work on his shoes. Brattle’s head reappeared above the top of the counter, coming into sight slowly and with evident caution on the part of the owner, as if he was in doubt about the wisdom and safety of the movement.

“You haven’t answered my question,” said the bootblack, bringing Deacon Cornhill back to the real situation by his demand. “Can my friends go with me?”

“Every one of ’em, sart’in,” replied the other, thus showing that he was equal to the occasion. Then he asked: “How many air there?”

Rob shook his head, though it was evidently not in reply to the other's question, but relative to some thought in his mind. Presently he said:

"You are very kind, sir, but it cannot be. This is my life, and I could not fit into another. Good day, sir," picking up his kit to leave. Then, as if a second thought had come to him he paused, saying: "I'll not leave you in the gutter this time. If you want to find a good stopping place for the night I'll show you the way."

Feeling that it would be useless to urge his plans further then, Deacon Cornhill followed him in silence, glad to escape the foul atmosphere of this retreat. Still he was resolved in his mind to renew the subject at the first favorable opportunity.

In the midst of their rapid advance he suddenly became aware of the presence of another boy, though he had joined them in silence. He seemed five or six years younger than Rob. He was more ragged than the other; in fact, he was little but rags, though there was a saucy defiance in his pinched, unwashed features which

told that he had little care for his personal appearance, or what another might think. Rob evidently knew him, for he asked, familiarly:

“What luck to-day, old man?”

“Made ’leven cents and blowed in three. Say,” he added in an undertone, though loud enough to be heard by Deacon Cornhill, “got a big duck? Looks awful green.”

“Hush!” warned Rob, adding in a louder key: “I’ve got to see this gent here gets to Bradford’s O. K. Then I’ll hev you go home with me.”

“What’s yeour name, bub?” asked the deacon, who felt in duty bound to say something.

“Chick.”

“I mean the name yeour folks give yeou.”

“Golly! what an idee. Never had any, mister.”

“Where do you live?”

“Nowhere.”

“Onpossible. Where’d yeou stop last night?”

“Corner A and Tenth street.”

“Whose house, I mean. I hope it was a good man’s.”

"Dunno 'bout that, mister. I didn't see him, nor I didn't go in."

"But yeou said yeou stopped there."

"So I did."

"How could yeou if yeou didn't go in?"

"My cracky, ain't ye green? S'pose I'd gone in, how long d'ye s'pose I'd been guv to git out?"

"I don't understand yeou, bub."

"No more do I sich a cabbage as ye. I reckon there's a way o' stoppin' at a gentleman's house without bodderin' him wid yer comp'ny."

"How can that be?" asked the wondering deacon, beginning to think the boy was guying him. "How could you stop at a man's house without seein' any one or they seein' yeou?"

"Slept under the covin', mister."

"Marcy me! out in th' night? S'posin' it'd rained?"

"I'd got wet, I s'pose, seein' I'm not canvas-backed," with a grin.

"An' got yeour death o' cold?"

"Ain't so sure on thet, mister. Th' sun has

alwus dried a feller out slick, an' I ain't heerd o' his goin' out'n bizness yit. Hev ye?"

Deacon Cornhill made no reply to this direct question, and his next inquiry was in a different direction.

"What do yeou do, Chick? I think yeou had some sich onnatural name."

"Pick up odd jobs by which I can turn a penny, mister. My fambly is small, so I don't hev to hev much to feed 'em."

"Ain't yeou got any folks?"

"Nope."

"Don't yeou git tired o' livin' like this?"

"Don't know any other way, mister."

"What a pity. In this Christian land, too."

"Got any more questions to ax, mister?" as the other hesitated; "cos if ye hev I shall hev to begin to ax ye a fee, same's the big chucks do up to th' Recorder's offis."

While Deacon Cornhill was pondering upon the new train of thought awakened by this chance meeting with the child of the street, they quite suddenly came upon a crowd of people gathered about the entrance to a gloomy struc-

ture near at hand, while a confused medley of sounds came from the promiscuous collection.

“What’s the matter?” asked Deacon Cornhill, with surprise.

“Only a girl up for vagrancy,” replied a bystander. “It don’t take much to draw a crowd. But she’s a pert one, and with a boy’s name.”

“What is it?” asked Rob, beginning to show excitement.

“Joe Willet, or some sich a name, she give the Recorder.”

Without waiting for the slow-speaking stranger to finish his sentence Rob began to elbow his way through the jostling crowd, and a moment later passed the high portals of the wide door.

“Here, here, my son!” cried the frightened deacon, excitedly, “wait for me,” and regardless of the jeers and outbursts of the spectators, he made a furious dash in the footsteps of Little Hickory.

“Hi, mister!” cried Little Chick, trying to keep beside the excited countryman, “keep with me and we’ll find Hickory.” Then he added to

the amused onlookers: "Of all the dratted fools he's the lunkiest!"

Meanwhile Rob had got inside the building, and, regardless of the curious spectators gathered on either hand, pushed his way forward until he had reached a small court or opening before a high desk, above which the gray head of the stern police justice could be seen, as he looked calmly down at a frail girl, trembling from head to foot, as she stood beside the iron railing in grief and terror.

She was clad in a ragged dress, without any covering for her head. Though her features were bathed in tears, her brown hair had been cut short, and there was a general appearance of despair in her looks and actions, she was an attractive girl of possibly sixteen.

At sight of her, Rob stopped suddenly in his impetuous advance, saying, in a voice heard in every part of the old building:

"Joey, I have found you at last! Have courage. Ragged Rob is still your friend, if everybody else in the world turns against you."

CHAPTER V.

SURPRISE UPON SURPRISE.

At the sound of Rob's ringing voice every gaze in the spacious room, even to that of the grim justice, was turned upon the fearless young bootblack, who, despite his grimy features and soiled, ragged clothes, looked every inch a hero. One countenance lightened at sight of him, and she at the prisoner's bar cried in a joyful tone:

"Oh, Rob!" and then she seemed about to fall, as if the opportune appearance of her friend had overcome her. But she quickly overcame her weakness, saying in a supplicating voice:

"Save me from the workhouse, Rob. Mother does need me so."

"I will, Joey; never fear. What is the charge, your honor?"

“Vagrancy, coupled with trying to pass bad money and being generally a suspicious character,” replied the justice.

“There’s not a word of truth in it!” exclaimed Rob, impetuously.

“Order!” commanded the justice, and a burly officer moved towards the excited youth, ready to seize him at the word from his superior. A murmur of excitement ran over the throng of spectators

“Has she been sentenced?” asked Rob, recovering his self-possession and speaking with a calmness he was far from feeling.

“Blackwell’s—thirty days,” was the stern reply.

“It must not be!” declared Rob, boldly. “She cannot be guilty, Mister Justice; there must be some mistake. Is there no way to save her from the workhouse, for she is needed at home, where she has a sick mother dependent upon her?”

“As this seems to be her first offence, if there was some one to answer for her she might be let off this time,” and though this may have been only his imagination, Rob thought the justice

said this gladly. At any rate it gave him hope, and he said promptly:

“I will answer for her, Mister Justice.”

“That could not be done, as you are but a minor, as well as unknown to us.”

Rob's countenance fell, but at that moment a loud voice from the rear of the court-room exclaimed:

“I'll answer for her, judge! That gal must never go to th' workhouse. It would be a burning shame in this Christian age.”

A buzz of surprise ran over the scene, while Deacon Cornhill, who had made the bold declaration, pushed his way forward to the side of the young bootblack.

“It's too bad to send sich an innercent child to th' workhouse, judge. How much is there to pay?”

“Who are you, sir?” demanded the justice, looking askance at the countrified speaker.

“Deacon Elihu Cornhill, of Basinburg, yeour honor.”

“And you promise she shall be provided for, Mr. Cornhill?”

“I do, judge.”

“Very well. In that case sentence is suspended during good behavior. She is too young, and apparently too innocent, to be sent to the workhouse. But remember, miss, if you are brought back here double sentence will be imposed.”

“Shameful, judge. Send sich a bright gal to the work—”

“Silence!” ordered the justice, at the same time pushing a ponderous book toward the discomfited deacon. “Please put your name down there.”

As soon as Deacon Cornhill had signed the necessary document, and finding that she was free to do so, the young prisoner took Rob's hand. Then, without further delay, while a generous murmur of applause came from the crowd of spectators, the three left the court-room, finding Chick waiting for them at the door.

“Where have you been, Joe, since that dreadful night when the old rookery was torn down over our heads, and we lost each other?”

“Almost everywhere, Rob. I am so thankful

now that you have saved me from the work-house that I cannot say anything."

"It was not I, Joey, but this kind gentleman, Deacon Cornhill."

"I wish to thank you, sir. If you'll only come home I'm sure mother will do much better than I can. Poor mother! how she must have been worrying about me."

"How is she, Joe?"

"No better, Rob. And I have been away all day. You will go home with me?"

"Yes, as soon as I have shown Mr. Cornhill to Bradford's.

"Don't do that, my son. Go home with the gal first, and if she don't object, I'll go along with yeou."

"Mother will be glad to see you, sir, and I want you to go. How, you have grown, Rob, since I see you last."

"No more than you have, Joe. You are as tall as mother now, almost. But as we walk along you must tell us how you came to be brought before the justice. Chick, you'll go with us."

"Well, you see, Rob," began the girl, "mother

has been so poorly for a week that I've neglected business. But today, seeing we had nothing in the house to eat, and no money, I had to start out in earnest. I seemed pretty lucky at once, for inside of an hour I met a fine old gent, who give me ten cents to carry his portmanteau three squares, and—"

"The lazy bones!" interjected Deacon Cornhill. "Do you mean to say, miss, the man let you carry his satchel alone?"

"I was glad to have him, sir, for it meant dinner for poor mother, and medicine, too."

"Isn't your father livin'?"

"No, sir; he died twelve years ago. And mother has been ill for four years."

"What do yeou do for a livin'?"

"Sell flowers, papers, or do anything that will bring me a few cents. Sometimes I run errands, or carry gentlemen's bundles."

The kind-hearted deacon groaned, while she resumed:

"After I had parted with the old gent I found a flashy dressed young man, who wanted me to run an errand for him, and when I got back he

give me a silver quarter. It seemed so much for him to pay for so little work that I wanted him to take my ten-cent piece, which he did. From that time until noon I earned only three cents, but with my quarter I felt quite well pleased. So I thought to buy something real nice for mother and then go home. When I come to pay for the rolls and cake the man said the money was bad. I could not believe it, and while I tried to explain to him how I had got it, he called the police, when I was taken to the justice's court and there kept until you found me."

"The sinfulness o' this sinful city!" exclaimed the deacon. "And to think they were going to take yeou to th' workshop."

"I wish to thank you again for your kindness, sir. You see, Rob and I used to be old cronies, but we have not seen each other for over two years. But here we are at home. How glad mother will be to see us. But, dear me! here I've not brought her a crumb to eat. How could I have forgotten it?"

"Is it possible you live here, Joey? But go right in with Deacon Cornhill, while I go after

something for her and you to eat. I will be back soon. Chick can shift for himself."

"Buy something good," said Deacon Cornhill, pulling out his pocketbook and handing Rob a five-dollar bill, which, however, the latter made him exchange for one of a smaller denomination.

If this honest countryman had learned to like bluff, hearty little Hickory, he was not less pleased with the brave-hearted girl, whose only name, as far as he yet learned, had that decidedly masculine ring of Joe.

"If th' leetle gal is willin' I'll step in and see her mother."

"Come right in, sir. But you must be prepared to find scanty room. Our house is so small, that is, narrow, our rooms are not more than three feet wide. Still, now we have got used to them, we get along quite comfortably."

Deacon Cornhill, by this time, was prepared to be surprised at nothing in New York, but this dwelling fairly staggered his senses. The entire width of this building, which was four stories in height, was scarcely five feet outside measurement. Was it a wonder the man just

from the country, where space is a matter of small consideration, was amazed at this peculiar structure, with its long apartments so narrow he could barely turn around? It seemed that at some time the land upon which it stood had been a matter of contention, until finally the owner, to spite his neighbor, had erected this tall, narrow building on his limited grounds. It was occupied at this time by three families, one of whom was the Willets, mother and daughter, Josephine, Rob's "Little Joe."

In the midst of his astonishment Deacon Cornhill was ushered into the presence of the invalid mother, who, after giving Joey a joyous greeting, received him in a manner which told that she had been well bred.

"But I am so helpless here," she said. "I feel very grateful for befriending Joe, who is my mainstay. I must have been taken to the poorhouse soon after I was obliged to give up work, but for her. It has been so hard since my husband died. Ah, John and I never dreamed of what was in store for us when we left our old home in Maine to begin a new life

here in the great city. It was a new life, but a hard one. He was a good mechanic, but we had not been here two years before he was taken down with the fever. Of course, as soon as he stopped work his wages stopped, and when he died I was without a penny, and Joey a little girl. How many times I have pined for the old home, but, alas! I shall never see it!"

"Yeou shall!" cried Deacon Cornhill, vehemently, for almost at the outset of their conversation the subject uppermost in his mind had received an impetus he had not anticipated. "That is, yeou may not see the *old* home, but yeou may see another just as good."

If at first she thought him demented, he quickly explained the proposition he had made to Rob, when Joey clapped her hands with delight.

"It will bring back your health, mother."

"I know the sweet scent of the country air would do me good, my daughter, but do not raise any false hopes. We have not a cent to get there, if we had any place to flee to."

"Hurrah!" cried the usually dignified dea-

con, forgetting his staid ways in the excitement of the moment, "my case is as good as won. Yeou shall both of yeou go if you will, and never return to this wicked city."

"Here comes Rob!" cried happy Joe, beginning to dance along the space of the narrow room. "We'll talk it all over with him, and what a happy day it'll be!"

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE NEWS WAS CARRIED TO BASINBURG.

“I can do it and I will!”

The mixed train from the South was drawing slowly out of Wenham Junction, as Phil Hardy simultaneously uttered this speech and threw himself upon the back of old Jim, his father's farm horse. It was in the early part of April, and the mud along the country roads was deep and soft, which fact was shown by the appearance of the horse and its boyish rider.

Phil was the eldest son of 'Squire Hardy, one of the leading citizens of Basinburg. He was a harum-scarum youth of eighteen, who always seemed to be mixed up in every affair of a shady character taking place within a radius of twenty miles. Like boys of his ilk, he ever seemed to

be present whenever anything of an unusual nature was occurring, and "to get his fingers in the pie," to use an expression current at that time in the quiet, out-of-the-way hamlet of Basinburg. Not another boy in town would have ridden five miles through the mud that day to have been in Wenham at this time. But Phil had not missed it, and as he picked up Jim's reins, heading the horse homeward, he added to what he had already said:

"They ought to know it just as quick as they can, and they shall! Won't they stick out their eyes though? Let me see. This train goes by the Bradford loop, makes four stops, and it'll use up forty minutes in getting to Basinburg. Old Jim ought to take me there in half an hour. He can and he shall! Go on, you old veteran of the plow! we're the bearers of the news from Ghent."

Laughing, as he gave expression to this whimsical speech, Phil urged Jim ahead at the top of his speed, while the good people of Wenham had further reason to comment upon the wild ways of 'Squire Hardy's scapegrace son.

The road to Basinburg was sparsely settled, so Phil saw few people until he entered the quiet hamlet, which, as its name indicated, was situated in a valley shaped very much like a huge basin, with roads running around the rim. Most of the population lived on these circular highways, which met at the lower end, where the post-office, church and store were located, surrounded by the larger portion of the dwellings.

The sight of Phil's mud-bespattered figure and the foaming condition of his horse called the more easily excited of the inhabitants from their houses, while he shouted at frequent intervals:

“Come and see the elephant! Nothing like it ever came to town!”

Utterly regardless of his grammar, or the comments he was calling upon himself, Phil repeated his rather incoherent speech, and by the time he had uttered it a dozen times, the boys of the town began to follow him, wondering what new scheme he was carrying out. This soon aroused Phil to more earnest cries, while he prodded old Jim ahead faster than before. Small wonder if the people began to rush after

the crazy rider, until a mob of excited men and women, as well as boys, was at his heels.

“What is it, Philip?” asked the gray-headed parson, running out in his slippers, hatless and coatless.

“Deacon Cornhill—hoodlums of New York—a mob!” was all the anxious crowd could distinguish in the medley of cries.

Still Phil showed no signs of stopping or checking his wild ride, his course being now toward the little way-station, about half a mile below the post-office village. On account of the high grade this had been as near as the cars could come into town.

At every house the trail of followers was increased by one or more members, every one believing that something terrible had happened or was about to take place. Hardly looking back Phil rode straight on toward the depot, old Jim covered with mud and panting for breath. As he came in sight of a low, wooden building the whistle of the approaching train was heard a quarter of a mile away.

“I’m in season!” exclaimed Phil, triumph-

antly. "Come on, folks, if you want to see the sight of your lives!"

The oncoming spectators needed no further urging to do this, and scarcely had the boyish rider reined up his spent horse by the narrow platform before the foremost of his followers, regardless of the slush ankle-deep about the station, rushed upon the scene. Others rapidly added to their numbers.

"What is it, Phil?" asked Lon Wiggles, who had outrun all others in reaching the place. "What has brought you home from Wenham like this?"

"I know," replied Phil, with a knowing toss of his head, as he sprang from old Jim's smoking back.

"I s'posed you did, but that needn't make a crab of you."

"Excuse me, Lon. I see Deacon Cornhill on the train down at Wenham."

"Is that all?" and looks of disgust and disappointment settled on the features of those near enough to overhear this dialogue. It is

needless to say Phil was maintaining this air of mystery more for their benefit than Lon's.

"Can't you wait till a feller has time to think? No, it ain't all. The deacon is coming home with a carload of New York cattle. But here comes the train; look for yourself. Ladies and gentlemen, Deacon Cornhill is coming home with all of the poor of New York at his heels. See for yourselves," waving his hand in a tragical manner, as the long train came pounding along the iron rails.

With puffs and snorts, as of rage at being stopped in its wild career, the engine came to a standstill just beyond the upper end of the station, so as to bring the two passenger cars nearly opposite the building.

With a faint inkling of what they were to expect, the spectators stood looking on with gaping mouths and staring eyes, while the tall, stoop-shouldered figure of Deacon Cornhill appeared on the rear platform. His benevolent features were lighted with an uncommon glow, as he gazed upon the crowd gathered thus unexpectedly about the station. Hesitating but

a moment, he descended the steps, and then turned to look back.

The object of his gaze was soon apparent, for at that moment other passengers were following him from the car. In the lead of these came a tall, rather good-looking, but plainly dressed boy of seventeen, whose pinched features were illuminated by flashing eyes. He was none other than Ragged Rob, ex-bootblack of New York. Leaning on his arm was a middle-aged woman, recognized by the onlookers as his mother beyond a suspicion of doubt. Her countenance was thin and careworn, while her brown hair was thickly streaked with threads of silver.

No sooner had Rob assisted his mother down the steps than he turned to help others in lifting a pallid-faced woman, who was an invalid, from the car. Close behind her came a pale, frightened girl, who shrank near to Rob at sight of the wondering spectators. They were Mrs. Willet and Joey.

While the poor invalid was carried to a settee at one side of the station, a woman with cadaverous countenance and wild eyes, and a man who

had to be lifted down from the car, reached the platform, the latter being borne to a second bench. Then an elderly woman, with a strange-looking peaked cap, and squat figure, followed, while close behind her came a girl of fourteen and five boys, ranging in ages from ten to fifteen years.

During this brief delay a small lot of baggage had been thrown on the station floor, and as the last of the ill-favored passengers alighted, the conductor waved his hand, the bell rang, the engine puffed anew, the wheels began to revolve, and the train rolled away, leaving the little group of persons the centre of observation of many pairs of curious eyes.

“For gracious sake, what have you been doing, deacon?” asked 'Squire Hardy, a short, thick-set individual, who had been among the first to reach the place. He was troubled with asthma, and the exertion in reaching the station had put him out of breath and humor.

Though amazed at this most unexpected greeting, Deacon Cornhill soon recovered from his surprise enough to say :

"I have just brung home a leetle company, 'Squire, I—"

"Huh!" was the rejoinder. "Company? I should say company! Where did you pick that 'sortment of folks?"

"In the streets o' New York," replied the deacon. "Never see sich sights in my life, 'squire. Why, th' ground is just runnin' over with folks, and sin and wickedness is thicker'n th' folks! I swan! it's too bad, and so I persuaded th' half-starved critters to come to Basinburg with me. I know yeou'll lend a helpin' hand for 'em to hev homes. Them empty house'n deserted farms on the Hare road can be as well filled as not."

All the time he was speaking the crowd pressed nearer and nearer, causing the new-comers to huddle close together, with half-frightened looks on their faces. Though used to seeing mobs, and having lived in crowded streets, there was something about these spectators which sent a feeling of terror to their hearts. Rob was the only exception, and as an over-anxious burly individual pushed his way toward the helpless man

and woman, he stepped brusquely forward, exclaiming:

“Stand back, sir! You’re crowding a sick man and woman. Seems to me there ought to be room for ’em out here.”

The man retreated muttering:

“Be keerful how you sass yer betters, ye insolent critter.”

At this remark a murmur went up from the crowd, which it was plain to see were generally unfriendly to the new arrivals. The last did form a motley-looking party, as even Deacon Cornhill himself could not deny.

“They look like furrin truck!” declared one of the spectators, whereupon a general nod of assent was given.

“Please stand back, all,” implored Deacon Cornhill.

“Want us to stand here all day ankle deep in the mud I s’pose,” exclaimed one in the background, as if he had not come of his own free-will.

“Yes, stand back, one and all!” ordered ‘Squire Hardy, and at his command there was a

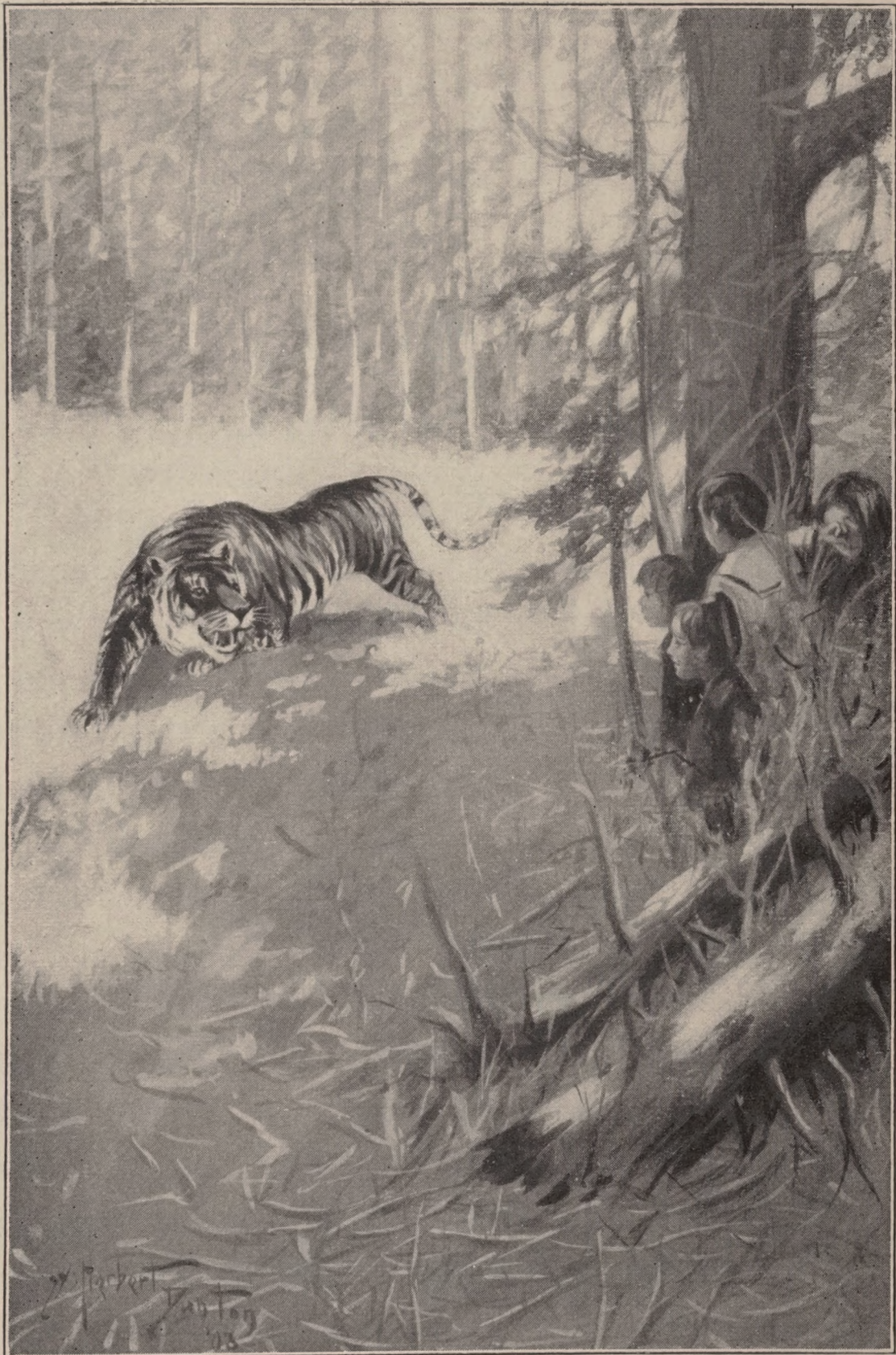
slight shifting of positions. It was very plain he was the majority looked to for guidance. If he had said be friendly to these unprepossessing strangers Deacon Cornhill would have had no cause for further worry over the matter. Unfortunately, though there was no evidence of it in their outward appearance, this couple entertained a bitter dislike for each other, owing to an old trouble. Of course the deacon had his friends present, if no one had spoken an encouraging word, but they were very much in the minority. But, as 'Squire Hardy seemed disposed to be fair, he gathered new courage, saying:

“I will explain all as soon as I've made these poor sick ones more comfortable.”

No one had suggested that they be taken into the station, so their kindly protector did not offer to do it. But he removed his overcoat and placed it over Mrs. Willet, so as to keep her warm, while he arranged the man so his position was more easy. Fortunately the day was mild, and as Deacon Cornhill turned to face the half-angry crowd, the setting sun threw a wide bar

of golden splendor over the western sky, which halo was reflected on the distant hills, giving to the spring scene a hint of summer. A flaw of April wind stirred the long, thin locks of the gray-headed philanthropist, as he slowly raised his spare right hand to admonish silence.

If a calm had fallen on the scene it was the calm that usually precedes the storm. Deacon Cornhill already felt that it was coming, and trembled for the result; 'Squire Hardy expected it; and the aroused spectators were waiting impatiently to show their willingness in sending out of the town this unexpected and unsought addition to their population. How the storm broke in all its terrible fury will be told in the coming chapter.



The cry of the frightened boys and girls had suddenly aroused
its rage

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CHAPTER VII.

THE DEACON EXPLAINS AND THE SQUIRE OBJECTS.

“Ahem,” began Deacon Cornhill, clearing his throat, and while he did so looking anxiously over the crowd, wondering still how so many people came to be there. “Ahem! I—yeou see, fr’ins, this is sich a s’prise to me I hardly know how to begin. Yeou see I got to New York, an’ I never see sich sights, I swan, I never did! I hadn’t more’n got into town afore a spruce chap stepped up an’ slapped me on the shoulder, just same ’s Sam Williams would, an’ yeou all know how terrible common Sam is. Wa’l, he claimed he knowed me up here in Basinburg—told a whoppin’ story ’bout chasin’ a calf out’n my garden seven or eight years ago. But all the time he was arter the church money, an’ ’tween

him an' ernother an' a parcel o' boys they e'enamost got it, an'—"

"Not got the church money, Elihu?" called out a shrill voice from the rear of the crowd, and then Mrs. Cornhill, who had been attracted to the scene the same as the others, pushed her way frantically forward, until she stood on the station platform in front of the abashed deacon. "Yeou don't say yeou hev lost the church money, Elihu?"

Several among the spectators groaned.

"Don't git 'scited, Mandy; don't git 'scited. I didn't lose the church money, thanks to this boy here. But if 'em dog—"

"Hush, deacon, it's yeou who's gittin' 'scited."

"Wa'al, if yeou had been where I hev, Mandy, an' seen what I've seen yeou'd git 'scited. But this boy here got my money all back, and then, when he tuk me round to show me how folks live in that big, wicked city, I swan, I felt like givin' 'em all homes right here in Basinburg!"

"I should think you had brought back a good part of the city," said one of the bystanders.

“Pity the poorest if you call these good,” cried another.

“I tuk a fancy to Rob, here,” continued the deacon, unheeding the interruption, “arter th’ good turn he did me. But when I axed him to go home with me, he said he couldn’t leave his mother, which I hold was a good sign in the boy. I told him to take her right erlong, too. But he had fri’nds, an’ I told him to take ’em erlong, too, though I didn’t s’pose there was more’n a house full. Luddy me! when I come to see how they lived, I wouldn’t take no for an answer, but they must come, with all th’ land an’ fresh air, an’ room we hev out here.

“Why, it nighly tuk away my breath to just look in their houses. If yeou will b’lieve it, Mr. Little,” pointing to the invalid man, “lived in a den right under the road, with teams drivin’ overhead, an’ he a suffocatin’ in a leetle room nine feet underground. It was only six foot by eight, an’ he had no fire, only the part o’ an old bedstead to lay on, an’ an old tick half full o’ musty hay an’ a dirty piller. Mrs. Willet an’ her darter lived in a house only four foot wide,

though th' Lord only knows how high it was. Just think o' that, an' then o' th' houses standin' empty here th' year round.

“These youngsters here were runnin' wild like young colts turned out to paster, only there weren't no fences to keep 'em within bounds, an' there was no halters on 'em to head 'em inter their stalls when it come night. I tell yeou it made my blood bile just to see sich works right in this civilized land. I thought o' 'em houses on th' Hare road standin' empty, an' says I to myself, 'there's room fer 'em, an' I know th' good people o' Basinburg will turn to an' lend a helpin' hand.' ”

He was perspiring freely, while he showed great excitement, but his animated speech was greeted with a profound silence. It is true some one started to cheer him, but he did not have the courage to give full expression to his feelings. The majority were waiting for 'Squire Hardy to speak, and the rest were too timid to venture an opinion until he had spoken. Clearing his throat, he finally said:

“It might have been well enough, deacon, if

you hadn't brought a car-load. It's a mystery to me how they got money enough to pay their fares, unless you brought them home on the church money."

This was a cruel thrust, the very worst he could have made, and it was several moments before Deacon Cornhill could rally sufficiently to reply. His hesitation was misunderstood by the larger portion of the spectators, which gave a still worse aspect to the situation.

"I am an honest man, 'Squire," replied Mr. Cornhill at last, "an' I can account for every cent o' the church money," and for the first time he was accorded a faint outburst of fellow-sympathy.

He was too modest to mention that it had cost him nearly fifteen dollars of his own money to make up for their deficit, and he continued:

"Am I to understand that yeou air opposed to treatin' these poor folks like neighbors, 'Squire?"

"I'm opposed to nothing that's human, but you know, deacon, there's a limit to what we can stand. I never was in favor of foreign immi-

gration. What do you say, folks?" appealing to those around him. "No doubt the good old deacon meant all right, but look at the crowd he has brought among us, and say if you want them."

"Paupers, every one of them!" cried a voice from the throng.

"Perhaps worse than that," declared another. "They look to me like a parcel of thieves!"

"Paupers and thieves!" exclaimed a dozen in the same breath, until Deacon Cornhill turned pale, as he felt that ominous results were likely to come from his well-meant intentions.

The little party of strangers huddled together in great trepidation, excepting their leading spirit, Ragged Rob, who had so gladly yielded to the counsel of their would-be benefactor and lent his influence toward getting them here. Something of the spirit of the stern man for whom he had been nicknamed flashed in Little Hickory's eyes, and drawing his figure to its full height with a dignity felt all the more for the ragged suit in which he was clothed, he exclaimed in a tone heard to the limit of the scene:

“Paupers and thieves, never! We are poor, but we are willing to earn an honest living. Deacon Cornhill, if we are not wanted here—”

“Tut—tut, lad!” said the other in an undertone, “this will soon blow over,” though he had his misgivings.

“You see how it is, deacon, and how the people feel,” said the 'squire, with a ring of triumph in his voice. “This bringing so many city hoodlums into our midst is a risky experiment. For my part, I had rather my house should burn down than to have such people in it.”

“It'd be pretty sure to if any o' 'em were in it,” cried a zealous friend.

“I do not believe there is a house on the Hare road they can get.”

“No, no, no!” came from every quarter.

'Squire Hardy looked exultant, while Deacon Cornhill was dumbfounded. No one had ventured to speak a word in his behalf.

“What have you done, Elihu?” asked Mrs. Cornhill, who had but a vague idea of the situation.

“Don’t git ’scited, Mandy; it’ll soon blow over. Fri’nds,” he continued, addressing the crowd, “don’t misjudge yeour neighbors. These poor folks air all honest, as I’m willin’ to take my vow. Why, if it hadn’t been for this boy I shouldn’t hev lived to come home. He not only saved my money, but my life, an’ I’ll stand by him now.”

“Good for you, deacon,” some one was bold enough to cry out, when a faint cheer followed. This encouraged him to resume:

“If you don’t want these poor folks in your houses, I’ll look ’em up some places. They can stop at my place to-night. But here we air keeping this sick man and woman here, to say nothing o’ th’ rest. I wish I had my two-hoss jingle wagon here, I swan, I do.”

At first no reply was made to this, but finally a farmer from the upper part of the town said:

“If you want to go arter your wagon, deacon, you can have my team to go with, if you will only leave a barrel of flour that is in the wagon at Widder Short’s.”

Deacon Cornhill gladly accepted this offer,

and he lost no time in starting, saying, as he clambered over the high-backed seat:

“Yeou can go with me if yeou want to, Rob.”

“I thank you, sir, but I had rather remain with mother and the rest. I think it will be best for me to do so.”

“If you please, sir, I would like to go,” said Chick.

“So yeou can, bub; and you, too,” nodding to another, a year older than Chick, and known as “Ruddy.”

The boys were happy, but Deacon Cornhill was too deeply engrossed over the situation to pay much heed to his young companions, as he gathered up the reins and drove away from the station. This reception was very different from the triumphal entry into town which he had anticipated.

“The 'squire is still ag'in me, an' he means to make trouble,” he mused. “If he won't let 'em go on th' Hare road, they shall go somewhere. I have it! I'll put 'em up on Break o' Day; that's just what I'll do. Git erlong, old Dan! that's just what I'll do.”

So absorbed was the good man in his plans that he did not notice he had already got the raw-boned horse into a smart gait, so that the old wagon was drawn through the mud and over the rocks at a tremendous rate, giving the boys about all they could do to hold upon the high-backed seat, while the barrel of flour rolled about at the great risk of being sent from the vehicle altogether.

“The Break o’ Day is their only hope,” repeated the deacon, as he rode on with increasing speed.

Lost to other thoughts in his eagerness to get back to the station, he continued to urge the horse ahead, until by the time they had reached the outskirts of the little village the spirited animal was flying along the country road at the top of its speed. The way was rough, and the wagon jolting over the stony places kept the barrel of flour in constant motion. In fact, an uncommonly severe movement sent one head flying out into the mud, and the white, fluffy mass within caught up by the wind flew about like a perfect cloud over the occupants of the vehicle.

“Ginger and snaps!” cried Chick, who was enjoying the situation, “ain’t we spinning, Ruddy?”

“You bet! this is better’n the circus. Get up, old nag! if this is country life it jess knocks the spots off’n New York at her best.”

The boys were enjoying the affair if the deacon was not. Then, in the midst of this wild flight, when it seemed as if the sober member of Basinburg church had really lost his head, those inhabitants of the village who had not gone to the station rushed out of their houses to see what was taking place.

Getting a vague outline of the deacon’s stalwart figure amidst the cloud of flour they began to cry out in dismay. This only served to arouse the deacon the more, and swinging his long whip in the air he cried louder than ever:

“Get erlong there, Dan Crow! it’s Break o’ Day or nothing!”

The old wagon making a noise and confusion heard to the farthestest section of the village, the half-crazed deacon and his young companions, who were shouting with laughter, were borne on

at a wilder pace than ever. In the midst of this they passed the parsonage, when the horrified minister rushed out of the house, bareheaded and with outstretched arms, calling out to the horse to stop. Then, recognizing the form of his respected parishioner involved in the cloud of flour, he shouted in amazement:

“Why, Deacon Cornhill! what has happened? Stop—stop—st—”

“It’s Break o’ Day or nothing, parson; snow storm or no snow storm. Get erlong, Dan.”

The good man barely saved himself from being run over, as the deacon and his companions were carried past, the latter crying out in the ears of the bewildered preacher:

“Did you ever get left on the pavements?”

CHAPTER VIII.

ROB STANDS HIS GROUND.

Meanwhile the crowd about the station had watched the departure of Deacon Cornhill in silence, but no sooner had he disappeared in the distance than 'Squire Hardy held a consultation of a few words with his nearest friends. Then he turned to address Rob, who, realizing that a crisis of some kind was at hand, calmly waited for him to speak.

"Youngster," began the 'Squire, "it must be plain to you by this time that you and your followers made a mistake in coming here as you have. In the first place it can be of no advantage to you, and in the second place you are not wanted by us."

"I am sorry, sir, that it has happened as it has, but it does not seem to me that any one is to blame. We have come with honest intentions—"

“It requires honest people to carry out honest intentions. It's the doing that counts. Come, it is nearly night, and you have barely time in which to get out of town before dark. The walking is good on the railroad track.”

The tone more than the words nettled Ragged Rob, and he exclaimed:

“It will be better or worse, before I or my friends go that way.”

“Don't you throw any of your New York sass in my face, you ragged dog. You'll either get out of town pretty lively of your own account, or we will help you in a way you may not like. I give you fair warning and five minutes of time to get started in.”

A groan came from the suffering man on the settee, while the others of the forlorn little group turned pale with fright. But Little Hickory was made of sterner stuff, and drawing his slender figure to its full height, making him look like a fairy prince in disguise of rags, he replied in a tone heard by the most distant of the spectators:

“Sir, you cannot drive us away without mak-

ing trouble for yourself. We have come here peacefully, and we demand fair treatment. This poor man here," pointing to the invalid Mr. Little, "cannot take a step to save his life. And this sick woman," now pointing to Mrs. Willet, "deserves kind treatment at your hands."

This fearless speech was received with varying effect by the onlookers. It won the respect if not the admiration of some, while still others thought that perhaps the 'squire had been hasty in his denouncement. Others looked askance towards the justice, while he, feeling that he had been openly and defiantly humiliated, shook with anger, while he exclaimed in a voice husky with passion:

"Fool! if you think this high-handed piece of impudence is going through all right you'll find yourself most—mistaken."

'Squire Hardy used a word where I have inserted the dash which I do not care to quote, while he advanced towards Ragged Rob with a look of intense hatred. He seemed about to seize the brave boy in his grasp of iron, when the latter said:

“Lay a hand on me if you dare, Mr. Hardy.”

“Be careful how you make yourself liable for striking the boy,” spoke up one of the spectators who was standing at the corner of the station.

“If it wasn’t for the law I’d throw the young ripscallion into—” using another word that may have fitted his feelings, but which grated harshly even on that exciting scene. “As it is, I will make out a warrant for their arrest as quick as I can find pen and paper to do it, Johnson.”

“If you do you will have to get Sheriff Stanyan to serve it, ’squire.”

“I suppose you think I ought to let these hoodlums go where they wish, Johnson. I tell you the safety of the public demands that I stop them where they are.”

“You mistake my meaning, ’squire. While I may be sorry that they have come, I believe in fair treatment, and abiding by the law.”

“I should like to know who is breaking the law if it is not them,” snapped the justice, who was already inquiring for pen, ink and paper.

“I hardly know what charge you can bring

against them, 'squire, but you are doubtless better posted than I."

"If I weren't I'd hold my mouth," muttered the other, though being careful not to speak loud enough for Mr. Johnson to hear. In a louder tone he cried:

"I can arrest the whole crowd for vagrancy, and bring them up as suspicious characters. I calculate enough can be brought against them to put them in the lock-up to-night, and to send them adrift to-morrow. At any rate I propose to see what can be done. I want some one to go for Sheriff Stanyan. As Mr. Jones, the station agent, may wish to have his place cleared of such stock before night, I should advise that the messenger go for the officer with all speed possible."

At the conclusion of this speech the 'squire turned to see what effect his words had upon the little group of homeless strangers. He was disappointed to find that they had not brought any visible show of trepidation to any of them.

"Look here, Trask," addressing one of the spectators, continued the justice, "you have got

a good horse. Go to Bradford and find Sheriff Stanyan. Tell him I will have the papers all made out by the time he gets here."

"It's awful travelling, 'squire, and my horse—"

"Don't stop to consider the travelling, Trask, on a time like this. The safety of the public must be upheld. You shall lose nothing by the trip."

Without further opposition the man called Trask started for his team, which was hitched near by, and a minute later he rode away on his errand, while 'Squire Hardy went into the station agent's office to make out the required paper.

Though there was little display of excitement on the surface, it was really an exciting situation. The onlookers began to gather in little knots to talk over the affair, a few blaming the 'squire, but the majority upholding him in his decisive action. As is usual under such conditions, the forlorn strangers, ragged and penniless, proved to be equally friendless.

Ragged Bob improved the opportunity to

speaking a few words of encouragement to his companions, trying to assure them that it would be all right as soon as Deacon Cornhill should return. But even he felt in his heart that the kindly deacon would be powerless to meet and overcome the increasing enmity of his townspeople.

CHAPTER IX.

A STARTLING SURPRISE.

To add to the uncomfortableness of the situation threatenings of rain began to appear about this time, but the crowd of spectators showed no signs of dispersing, one and all waiting with curious interest to see what the end would be.

In the midst of the lull in the scene the 'squire reappeared, holding in his hand now a warrant for the arrest of the newcomers under the charge of Ragged Bob, who stood by the side of Joe and her mother at this time.

"I reckon I have made it strong enough to hold 'em," declared the justice, referring to the paper in his hand. "I hope Stanyan will get here before dark. Ah, it's going to rain soon. I wish Stanyan was here now."

The same wish may have been in the minds of others, and 'Squire Hardy was not the only

one who consulted his watch and calculated that it would be fully an hour later before the officer could be expected.

At this juncture the sound of a wagon approaching was heard, and all turned expectantly up the road, to discover a double team coming towards the station at a smart rate of speed. The seat contained one man and two boys. Covered from head to foot with the flour that had blown over him it was no wonder the driver was not recognized until he was near at hand.

“It’s Deacon Cornhill!” cried one of the bystanders. “But what in the world has he been doing with himself?”

The deacon did present a singular appearance, but he was unmindful of this, as he drove his team alongside the station platform, calling out in his cheery voice:

“I hope you ain’t got tired o’waiting, but I went as spry as I could. Here, boys, help throw the things in, and then we’ll give the sick ones a boost. Jim, jess hold my hosses.”

“Don’t know as I care about mixing up in

sich an affair," muttered the man addressed, quickly retreating to the rear of the crowd to escape a second invitation of the kind.

"I should like to know what you are up to?" demanded 'Squire Hardy, advancing, while he flourished the document in his hand so the other might see it. "I have sent for Mr. Stanyan to attend to these folks. I reckon he'll be in time to look after them," pulling out his watch and consulting it.

"We won't bother Mr. Stanyan, and there was no need for you to send for him, and before I shall let these critters go I want to know what you are going to do with them."

"So long as they are peaceful you have no business to meddle. Won't some of you lend a hand here to get this poor cripple into the wagon?" appealing to the bystanders.

"I asked you a civil question and you haven't answered it, deacon," said 'Squire Hardy, stepping in front of the other.

No one had volunteered to lend their assistance in reply to his request to help him and Rob lift Mr. Little into the wagon, while the horses

were becoming more restive each moment, with no one at the bit. The rain was beginning to fall in big drops, and altogether it was no wonder Deacon Cornhill began to grow nervous and discouraged.

“Why not let them go, 'squire?” asked Mr. Johnson, who seemed to be an honest man. “It is going to rain hard in a few minutes, and the deacon needs every moment if he would get under cover before it strikes.”

With these words the speaker took hold to help, and in a few minutes the entire party were seated in the wagon, though by that time the rain was falling fast.

Deacon Cornhill climbed up to the driver's seat, taking the reins stoutly in his hands. It needed no urging on his part to start the animals, and with a series of yells and jibes ringing in his ears the good man drove smartly away, glad to escape so easily.

'Squire Hardy stood silent, but his face livid with rage as he saw the strange party leave the station. The crowd of spectators had now sought the cover of the building, and were ex-

changing comments upon the singular conduct of the deacon one with another.

“Let the old fool go in the rain,” declared the 'squire. “He ain't heard the last of this, not by a long shot. I'll set Stanyan after 'em, and if he can't cook their goose I will if it costs me all I'm worth. Deacon Cornhill needn't think he is going to jeopardize the safety of the whole town by any such tomfoolery. I'll give you a dollar, Joe Dullard, if you'll foller 'em so as to tell where they go. If the deacon takes 'em home you'll see lively times before morning.”

But Deacon Cornhill had no intention of taking his party home. He feared too much the sharp tongue of Mrs. Cornhill, whom he had already found was opposed to the scheme, to do that even if he had wished. So he did not even pass his home as he drove ahead at a smart gallop through the rain, which was soon falling in a perfect torrent. As there was no covering to the wagon the entire party was suffering from the down-pouring, though the others had covered the two invalids as best as they could. For-

tunately there had been a large rubber blanket in the wagon, and this quite covered them, so they were kept comparatively dry.

The only ones who enjoyed the ride were the three boys, Chick, Ruddy and Dick, though two others known as Tom and Jerry joined with them in their outbursts of merriment. More than any one else of the little party from the great city Ragged Rob realized that the charm had fled from the picture, and that the dark background was now revealed. Only stern and determined work could win in the bitter struggle ahead. He had not lost faith in himself, but he knew that his companions were helpless to assist him or were of such a nature as to prove a hindrance rather than a power for good. But he was the last boy to despair. His whole life had been a battle against adverse circumstances, and tried in such a career he was not going to falter now. Thus he spoke encouragingly to his low-spirited companions and looked hopefully forward to their destination, wondering what sort of a place awaited them at the end of their journey.

The road to Break O' Day, as the place to which they were going was known, wound up through a deep wood for over four miles, and not a dwelling was to be seen on the entire route. Though they were somewhat protected from the rain under the overhanging forest, it was a dismal ride, and every one hailed with joy the opening at the summit of the hill or mountain.

The deacon spoke encouragingly to the weary horses, which started into a smart trot now that the way was comparatively level.

The Break O' Day track of country really consisted of a thousand acres of wild land, for the most, which had been largely cleared of its first growth by charcoal burners a few years before, and been allowed to send up a second growth of saplings now in that age termed "sprouts."

Of course the strangers to this isolated spot paid little heed to their surroundings, as one and all tried to escape as much as possible the drenching rain, which was falling faster than ever if that were possible. But Rob looked in vain for any sign of a house, until they had gone

half a mile, when he discovered a solitary frame house of two stories, and which had once been painted red on the outside. This paint was now worn off so that the broad sides of the building looked brown and dilapidated in the storm. There was not a whole window in the house and the door at the front side hung from one hinge.

But the gaze of the approaching observers was suddenly attracted by the sight of a couple of horsemen riding up in front of the building from the opposite direction.

Deacon Cornhill had seen the two men, and pulling up the horses he was driving, he said in a low, but husky, tone:

“It’s Sheriff Stanyan and ’Squire Hardy! They’ve got here ahead of us.”

CHAPTER X.

'SQUIRE HARDY OUTWITTED.

The reins trembled in the hands of Deacon Cornhill, who dared not contemplate the result of another meeting with his enemy. Rob proved himself better fitted to meet this emergency, and he asked:

“Is there no other house that we can have?”

“This is the only house on Break O’ Day. There are some sod houses that the coal burners lived in, but they are not fit places for you to stay.”

“If others have lived there we can. I do not believe they have seen us. See, they are dismounting and leading their horses under the shelter of the trees. Can we get to one of these sod houses without passing that house?”

“Oh, yes, there are two or three of them down this cart-way a short distance.”

“Then drive down there, and we will see what the 'squire will do.”

Nothing loathe, the deacon headed the horses down a narrow grass-grown path, where neither the footfalls of the animals or the revolution of the wheels gave back any sound.

Little dreaming of the close proximity of those for whom they were looking, Sheriff Stanyan and 'Squire Hardy, after seeing that their horses could not stray, hastily sought the old house that they might escape the pelting rain, while they watched and waited for their prey.

Meanwhile Deacon Cornhill drove slowly along the pathway where the bushes overhung them so that they slapped the occupants of the wagon in the face unless they held them back with their hands. After going a little way a small clearing was reached, on the upper edge of which Rob saw the open door of a couple of the oddest dwellings he had ever seen. In the great city some of his companions had left

dark, dismal quarters under the very streets to come into this remote region to seek the shelter of low structures built of poles stood up in an inclined position so their tops met, and the inclined plane covered with grass and sods. The rear ends of these simple dwellings were formed by big rocks against which they had been constructed, while the front was open the size of a door. Stone chimneys had been built at the further extremity, and through the open doorway could be seen the rough fireplace.

As the deacon stopped the horses in front of one of these primitive dwellings, Rob and the rest of the boys sprang down to the ground, and a hasty unloading of the few articles brought was begun. Mrs. Willet was lifted from the wagon and carried into the sod house, to be placed on one of the blankets. Then came Mr. Little's turn, when he was carried into the rude dwelling just beyond, it having been decided to divide into two parties.

Deacon Cornhill had not forgotten to take along a small supply of food, a few potatoes, some flour and pork, and other articles of

scarcely less account though less bulky. But there was no furniture, and when the last thing had been removed from the wagon and Deacon Cornhill surveyed the scanty store and the wet, gloomy surroundings he could not help feeling a bitter disappointment at the way his bright plans had turned out.

“Well, keep up good courage, boys, and we will see to-morrow if something can't be done for you. This is all my land round-about here, and such as it is make as free with it as if you owned it. I know it ain't rich soil, but in the valleys yeou will find a chance to dig up patches to plant. The coal-burners plowed up some of the best places, so it won't be quite like new sod. There is plenty of wood, and I advise yeou to build a fire the first thing yeou do.

“I s'pose I shall have to go home, as mother will be anxious about me. But I will come up in the morning, when we will lay our plans for the futur'. I hope the sheriff won't find yeou. If he does, yeou must do the best you can, Rob. I can't see how he can arrest you so long as yeou are peaceful. I will come up as early as

I can to-morrow. Let me advise the rest of you to mind Rob in what he says. He's got a good head on him, and he will help yeou out if anybody can."

With these words the honest-hearted man climbed back to the wagon seat, gathering up the reins headed the horses homeward, though as he rode away his gaze was turned backward until the bushes hid him from view.

"There is one honest man in this wilderness," said Mrs. Willet, "but it seems as if every one else was against us. I suppose we must hope for the best."

"To be sure, mother," replied Rob, who always addressed her thus, "and with the clearing away of the rain we will hope for better fare. Come, boys, help me get some wood so we can have a fire."

The other boys lending their assistance, while Rob's mother and the girls cleaned up the interior of the camps, a fire was soon blazing merrily in each of the rude dwellings, giving a surprising cheerfulness to the scene. Preparations for supper were begun at once, and alto-

gether the new-comers were as comfortable and hopeful as could be expected.

The rain was still falling steadily, though not as rapidly as at first, while it was growing dark.

Without stopping to eat supper with the others, Rob left the camp to see if he could learn anything of the two men at the old house, promising not to be gone long.

Upon coming out into the road within sight of the place no sign of life was apparent until he came near enough to see the horses still standing where their owners had left them.

Rob smiled as he thought of the officers waiting within for the appearance of himself and companions, while he stationed himself so he could watch for them to appear, if they were in the house, as he believed.

Fifteen minutes wore tediously away, and it was becoming too dark to distinguish an object very far away, when he saw two men leave the old red house. He had no doubt these were Stanyan and Hardy, a fact which was made conclusive when he overheard the latter say:

“By jove, Stanyan! I wouldn't stay there

any longer for all the hoodlums of New York."

"So the old red house *is* haunted after all," said the companion of the 'squire, and even in the darkness Rob could understand that the two men were greatly excited, if not frightened, over something they had seen or heard.

"Them sounds—sort of murder cries—sent the cold chills up my back," acknowledged Hardy. "Come, Stanyan, it can't be deacon has taken his tribe up this way, and we might as well go home. What an awful dark night it is getting to be."

"It must be the deacon took the tribe up to his house after all."

"They can't be coming to Break O' Day in this storm and darkness, but to make sure we had better go down the other way. It was a mistake we hadn't come that way."

"Well, there is one thing certain, Stanyan, wherever they have gone to-night we'll fix 'em to-morrow, eh? I'll give a cool fifty dollars to outwit the rascally deacon in this matter now I have got started."

"It is easy enough done, 'Squire. Whoa,

Tom! what in the world are you snorting at? You act just as if you had seen something in the brush, crouched lower to the ground, not daring

“Perhaps he was asleep, and you scart him,” said 'Squire Hardy.

Rob, who was concealed in the fringe of bush, crouched lower to the ground, not daring to breathe lest he should be discovered.

CHAPTER XI.

A CROWD AGAINST THREE BOYS.

Rob, who was crouching in the bushes close by, dared not breathe lest he should be discovered by the sheriff, who came within easy reach of him. But the sheriff's search was short and made in such a blundering manner that he failed to discover our hero.

“Come, Stanyan,” called out Hardy, “what’s the use of stumbling ’round there in the wet bushes? We shall get soaking wet, and I am always liable to have an attack of the rheumatism when I get wet.”

The ’squire was unhitching his horse, and a minute later Rob had the satisfaction of hearing the two riding away.

“Good riddance!” said Rob under his breath, as he started to return to the coal-camps.

When Rob got back to the sod houses containing his friends he found the others anxiously awaiting him. A plain supper prepared after considerable trouble, there being only a couple of small pails in which to do the cooking, was ready to be eaten, and while our hero joined in with the others he told what he had seen and overheard at the old red house, excepting the statements of the two men in regard to the place being haunted. Rob was wise enough to believe that no good would come of mentioning such a fact, if it were true.

After supper further preparations were made for the comfort, such as could be provided, of the two parties. The united numbers made fourteen persons in the little band of strangers in a strange land. These consisted of Robert Bayne, our hero, and his mother, a kind-hearted woman into whose life had seemed to come all the shadows and sufferings arising from the evil doings of a husband who was a fugitive from justice. It was not really known whether Bayne, the father, was living or not, but if he was there was a price set on his liberty, and his

wife breathed easier in his absence than she could possibly have done knowing his whereabouts. Mrs. Bayne had pinned her faith to Rob, and hoped and looked forward to a future freer from care than her past twenty years had been. But in spite of her outward cheerfulness the shadow of the past still darkened her life.

Then there were Mrs. Willet, the invalid widow, and her only daughter, Josephine, or Joe as she was generally called. Joe was one year younger than Rob, of a cheerful disposition and a willing worker, with a judgment remarkable for one of her years.

Mr. James Little, still suffering from an injury received when thrown from a heavy truck wagon in New York City, his wife Sarah, and their children, Lawrence and Mary, aged respectively eighteen and sixteen, made up another family. We shall soon learn more of them.

A kind old lady was "Aunt Vinnie," whose only care, and that was enough, was to look after her "boys" Tom and Jerry. The history of this three was quite unknown, except that

Aunt Vinnie claimed the boys to be the children of a sister who had died when they were very young. They were twins. At some time the three must have had surnames, but none of their present companions had ever heard them spoken.

Besides these were the three street waifs, who had been picked up and championed by Ragged Rob, Chick, Ruddy and Tony, whose ages ran from twelve to fourteen years, all of whom were far older in the varied experiences which come to such outcasts.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Little and Mrs. Willet were given the first attention, and they were made so comfortable that they slept for the most part of the night. The younger members, used to sleeping out of doors on the pavements, or at best under some box or wall, laid down on the earthen floor of these sod houses and soon fell into a refreshing sleep. But Rob and his mother did not seek sleep, while Aunt Vinnie and Mrs. Little only nodded at times.

The rain cleared away before midnight, and the following morning the sun shone brightly,

and the clear, warm atmosphere of a spring day made the landscape beautiful and stirred the hearts of the lonely wayfarers with the spirit of good cheer.

‘Isn’t this beautiful—delightful!’ cried Joe Willet, clapping her hands in wild ecstasy of joy. “Look yonder, Rob! did you ever see such lovely flowers?” pointing to some clumps of mountain laurels. “I can hardly stop to get breakfast before I pick some of them. Oh, I know we shall be so happy here; shan’t we, mother?”

“I trust so, my child, ” and the mother did not dare to speak of the fear in her heart.

“The country looks pretty, Joe,” replied Rob, “and I hail it as a good sign that the storm has cleared away so soon. But I must look around a bit to see what we can do. I hope Deacon Cornhill will get here before long.”

Now that it was daylight Rob saw that no signs of a dwelling was in sight. In fact it was as quiet, except for the songs of a few birds, as if they had been left in the heart of a great wilderness. This seemed very strange for those

who had come from the din, bustle and confusion of the great city.

“We shall soon get used to it,” declared Rob.

“Mercy me!” exclaimed Aunt Vinnie, “I don’t b’lieve I ever can. And as for Tommy and Jerry, why they will go just wild.”

After breakfast Rob and Larry went up to the old red house, but found no evidence that the building had been occupied for some time. It showed even worse ruin inside than it did outside. At places boards had been torn off, as if used for fuel, and few of the doors remained. As they passed from room to room the floor creaked dismally beneath their feet, while bats and birds flew about their heads, screaming out as if angry at this invasion of their domains.

“If we come here to live it will require lots of fixing up,” said Rob.

“I don’t care what ye think of it,” declared Larry, “but I jess feel like cutting off my big toe for coming up here into this dead man’s woods.”

When the forenoon had passed without bringing the deacon to see them, Rob grew anxious

and soon after dinner, accompanied by Chick and Ruddy, he started for Basinburg, hoping to meet their friend on the way.

Finally they reached Basinburg without meeting any one. Rob was beginning to feel that there was something wrong in this non-appearance of Deacon Cornhill, and not having been to the latter's house he was obliged to inquire of the first person they met how to reach his place. This individual proved to be a tall, slab-sided youth a little older than Rob, who eyed the other closely without replying to his question.

"When you get done looking at us," said Rob, "I shall be glad to have you tell me where Deacon Cornhill lives."

"Reckon you're some uv th' tribe what came to town yesterday?" he ventured to question.

"I shall be pleased to have you answer my question," said Rob.

"By gum! you're cooners!" and he started on a run towards the village.

"I should say you're the biggest cooner!" muttered Rob, not liking the conduct of the

other. However, he kept on in the direction of the town, closely followed by Chick and Ruddy.

The store and post office was soon seen, standing in a little clump of buildings, and it was evident that the tow-headed youth had spread the news of their coming, for a crowd was beginning to gather in front of the place. It required but a glance from Rob to see that the looks of this party boded him anything but good.

Believing that it was best for him to put on a bold front and meet the men squarely in whatever they should try to do, Rob showed no hesitation in his advance.

CHAPTER XII.

LITTLE HICKORY AROUSED.

It was apparent from the looks of the spectators that they had anything but a friendly greeting for the new-comers. Among them Rob saw 'Squire Hardy seated on a big box, closely watching their approach. A number of boys whose ages ranged from twelve to twenty years had hastily collected, and these pushed themselves forward into the pathway of the three from Break O' Day.

One of these whom Rob was soon to learn was the son of 'Squire Hardy, immediately made himself prominent, saying in a sneering tone, as he pointed at Rob:

"Ain't he a pretty duck, boys?"

"I wish to ask where Deacon Cornhill lives," said Rob, concealing his chagrin at the words of Ralph Hardy.

His intended question was followed by a painful silence, until the 'squire said:

“Well, why don’t you ask your question and have done with it? I should think you would want to know the fix you have got the pious old deacon into. Whose barn did you sleep in last night?”

“Nobody’s barn, sir. Will you tell me where Deacon Cornhill lives?”

At this point the ’squire held a hurried consultation with one of his companions without heeding the words of Rob.

Not caring to have more to say to this crowd Rob started to go on up the village, when young Hardy stepped in front of him, saying:

“You ain’t answered the old man’s question yet. Where ye’d stop last night?”

“I do not know as that matters to you as long—”

“Mean to sass me, do you?” demanded Ralph Hardy, doubling up his fist and acting as if he meant to fight. Half a dozen other boys, evidently thinking there was going to be some “fun” pressed forward closely upon his heels.

By this time Rob and his companions were

surrounded, so it looked as if they would have trouble before they could get away.

“Punch him, Ralph; he’s nothing but a cooner!” called out the voice of the tow-headed youth from the rear.

None of the men offered to stop the boys, but they watched the proceedings with evident pleasure.

“I am not meddling with you; let me go,” said Rob.

“You ain’t answered dad’s question. You can’t go till you have answered that, you New York hoodlum.”

Though the words and tone of the speaker nettled Rob, he did not like to begin a quarrel there, which he knew would likely work against him whatever the immediate result, so he started to move away without paying further heed to the pugilistic young Hardy.

At that moment some one threw a ball of mud which struck him upon the cheek, where the most of it stuck until he had wiped it away.

At this loud laughter, in which the men joined, rang tauntingly in his ears.

"Looks well!" cried one of the spectators. "Let me see if I can't fix the other cheek like it," and a second mud-ball struck Rob in the face, the moist dirt filling one eye so that he could not see plainly with it. Abused nature could stand no more, and Little Hickory was aroused. As soon as he could make himself heard for the loud huzzas that followed this last insult, he said in a tone that showed he was in earnest:

"Stand aside, sir, and let me pass."

"Lay so much as a finger on me if you dare!" replied Ralph Hardy, without offering to let him pass. "I stump you to touch me."

"I don't want any trouble with you," replied Rob. "We came here peacefully, and it is you who are making the fuss."

"You lie!" exclaimed young Hardy, shaking his fist in Little Hickory's face, "and you daresn't say you don't."

"If it was you alone and myself I'd make you eat 'em words," retorted Rob, his face now showing his righteous anger, while he continued to advance.

“You’re a sneaking, low-lived, dirt-covered hoodlum of the alleys of New York, and you have no business—”

Ralph Hardy had got so far, when flourishing his fist in the face of Little Hickory he hit him plump on the nose.

It is doubtful if young Hardy had really intended to strike Rob, as it was his purpose to make the latter begin the fight if he could, and the blow was not a severe one. But coupled with what had been said it was more than the undaunted Little Hickory could bear, and he caught the surprised bully by the waist with a strength which enabled him to lift the other clear from the ground.

Just how it was done none of the spectators could say, but they saw 'Squire Hardy's son describing a circle in the air, and then he was carried upward until he fell sprawling in the midst of a big mud puddle half a rod away.

“Hooray!” cried Chick, who, with Ruddy, had been an anxious witness of the preceding scene, but his cry was drowned by the uproar coming from the crowd of men and boys.

“He’s killed Ralph!” shouted ’Squire Hardy.
“Take him, boys!”

The onlookers immediately made a rush for the intrepid youth and his two companions.

For a moment it looked as though Rob would be torn limb from limb, but in order to do that it was first necessary to catch him.

If Little Hickory did not possess a pair of light feet he did own a pair of strong arms.

The first boy to reach him after Ralph shared the fate of the other. The next was sent headlong to the ground at the foot of the steps leading to the store.

By this time some of the crowd had rushed upon the rear, to be met by Chick and Ruddy. This twain if small proved themselves to be worthy of their leader. The first boy to feel their furious resistance was the tow-headed youth already mentioned, and he was doubled to the earth by their united efforts. Then they came in pairs, and so thick and fast that the doughty Chick and Ruddy soon found more on their hands than they could well handle.

Finding himself so hard pressed that he was

likely to be borne to the ground—crushed by an overwhelming power, Chick nimbly climbed the tall figure of a stalwart young man, where he perched himself on his shoulders, keeping his position in spite of the efforts of the other to shake him off.

Ruddy was scarcely less nimble, and finding himself beset by so many enemies that he could not hold his own, dodged between the legs of the nearest, sending him heels over head to the ground.

A second shared this fate, and by dodging to and fro, squirming like an eel as he passed one after another of the excited assailants, Ruddy reached the outskirts of the crowd.

He might have easily escaped then, but seeing the desperate situation of Rob, to say nothing of Chick, he sprang back to the fight like a little game-cock that never knows when it is getting the worst of it.

Assailed upon every hand Little Hickory, in spite of the valiant battle he was waging, sorely needed whatever assistance he could have. Regardless of what might follow, in his excitement

and awakened determination to win at any cost, he sent his enemies reeling backward on either hand, fairly forcing his way through the crowd.

“Don’t let the hoodlums get away!” cried ’Squire Hardy, hurrying forward to join in the fray if necessary. “He’s killed Ralph!”

This announcement was enough to cause the men to take a hand in the affray, and they rushed into the exciting scene just as Rob had finally succeeded in reaching the side of Ruddy.

At that moment some one threw a stone the size of a man’s fist, and the missile striking Little Hickory he fell to the ground with a low cry of pain.

“They’ve killed Rob!” cried Ruddy. “I’ll kill the hull scab of ’em!”

Catching up a handful of stones that lay only too handy for him, he began to hurl them into the midst of the crowd, which so frightened the men and boys that a hasty retreat was begun.

Crash went a pane of glass where one of the rocks went hurling through the store window, followed by a series of wild cries.

“Look out for the little devil or he’ll kill—”

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED CHAMPION.

As Ruddy raised his right arm over his head to throw the missile which might have struck some one with deadly effect, a clear, sharp voice rang out over the startling scene, quickly ending the outbreak:

“Hold, boy! don’t you throw that stone or I will horsewhip you within an inch of your life.”

The first word had been sufficient to check the rash boy in his dangerous work, when he turned hastily about to find a man had ridden close to the edge of the crowd, and standing up in his carriage held a long, stout whip poised over his head ready to send its stinging lash around his body did he fail to obey him.

“What is all this rumpus about?” demanded this new-comer, who instantly made himself master of the situation.

"These youngsters are raising particular cain with our boys, Dr. Menter. I don't know but they have killed Ralph," said 'Squire Hardy.

"Looks as though your boy was coming out of it better than this fellow with the bleeding head," replied the man in the carriage, who was the village physician, beginning to step out upon the ground.

Ruddy had dropped the rocks in his hand and stood with looks of combined fear and wonder. Chick had already dropped from his perch on a man's shoulders and sought the side of Ruddy.

"I hope he has been killed," declared the 'squire.

"Look out what you say, 'Squire Hardy, for such words as those might make you trouble and be inconvenient to explain in a court-room."

"So you stand up for the hoodlum, do you, doctor?"

"No, sir; I simply speak for fair play. It was a coward who threw that stone, and he has himself laid open to the law and a serious punishment if this boy has been fatally injured."

“He began the quarrel, and it was done in self-defense.”

“Let me advise you as a friend, 'squire, not to say too much. I will see if the boy is seriously hurt.”

While the other muttered something under his breath, Dr. Menter knelt beside Rob, to make an examination of his wound. This was found not to be of a serious nature, and in a few minutes our hero was able to sit up.

“You'll come out all right, youngster,” said the physician, “but it came pretty near being a close call.”

Upon finding that no one had been killed the spectators, who had been rather frightened over the outcome of the affair, a little while before, now boldly stepped forward.

“Stand back,” ordered Dr. Menter. “The boy is coming round all right, and there is no need of crowding upon us so.”

“Perhaps you have not heard who this fellow is, doctor,” said the 'squire, determined to follow up his side of the question. “He belongs to a herd of cattle the demented Deacon Corn-

hill brought into our midst from the slums of New York."

"The deacon has told me of his colonization scheme," replied the doctor, smiling. "But I am afraid he will never see it carried out."

"You are right there. We are not going to let them stay in town any longer than it takes to get them out."

"I do not believe you understand me, 'squire. The deacon took a sudden cold in the rain yesterday and is sick in bed threatened with pneumonia."

As this was a bit of startling news to the spectators one and all showed considerable concern.

"No business to have been fooling round with sich critters in the rain. He'd been all right if he'd gone right home," declared the unfeeling 'squire.

"I can't say about that, but he is a very sick man. There, I guess you will come out in good shape," said the physician to Rob, as he placed a plaster over the cut the latter had received on his head.

"Thank you, sir. I come down to the town

to see Deacon Cornhill," said Rob. "I do not know what I shall do if he is sick."

"He certainly cannot do anything for you now. Still if you want to go up to the house you can ride with me. I am going right back as soon as I can go to the post-office."

Rob thanked the physician, who seemed like an honest man, and concluded to accept his offer. Chick and Ruddy he advised to go back to Break O' Day. The crowd continued to scowl upon them, but the fact that Dr. Menter had spoken in their behalf kept any one, even 'Squire Hardy from uttering any further threats against them at that time.

On the way to the home of Deacon Cornhill the doctor questioned Rob closely in regard to his situation, when our hero frankly explained the matter from the time he had met Mr. Cornhill in New York.

"I am afraid you can't do much," said Dr. Menter, frankly, as Rob concluded. "You do not seem to have anything to do with. Besides I should judge that you must all have a very slight idea of getting a living in the country.

You say you want to cultivate the land at Break O' Day. What do you know about taking care of crops?"

Rob had to confess that he and his associates knew nothing. In fact he realized more than he had ever before the peculiar helplessness of himself and companions.

"The best thing you can do is to go back to the city," said the doctor.

"We haven't the money to do it," acknowledged Rob. "All together we cannot raise a dime."

The doctor whistled.

"How do you think you are going to live here? Had the deacon promised you any money?"

"No, sir; but he thought we could get work. We are willing to try our best."

"It would be surprising if you all felt that way. I should judge a crowd picked up in the way yours was would have at least some who would be dead-heads on the hands of the others. You say there are several among you who are unable to work if they wished."

"Two," faltered Rob, for the first time losing courage. Somehow the candid words of Dr. Menter struck to his heart as nothing said by others had done.

"Do you know what I think?"

"That we made a mistake in coming."

"Worse than that, young man. The deacon is famous for his foolish schemes, and that this caps the climax. No other man in town would have gone good for Jonas Lyford, and with the prospect of paying up another man's debt which is likely to take all he is worth, I should have thought Deacon Cornhill would have felt like letting you and your companions alone."

"We shall not make Mr. Cornhill any extra trouble, sir."

"The safest way for you to make good your words will be by leaving town at once. I can see that you have created an unfavorable impression already. Still I feel very sure that money enough to pay your fare to the city will be forthcoming if you conclude to go. I will give five dollars towards it myself."

"You are very kind, sir."

“You think you will go?”

Rob hesitated a moment before replying, but there was no mistaking his meaning when he spoke, low but firmly:

“I can't answer for my friends, but I have come to stay.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A WRITTEN NOTICE.

Dr. Menter made no reply to Rob's last statement, but a few minutes later, as he turned his horse into the drive-way leading to a comfortable-looking, old-fashioned two-storied house, he said:

"This is where the deacon lives. He is so sick I do not believe he will care to see you, so you had better remain in my carriage until I have come out. I will say to him that you have come."

Rob could do no better than to take up with this advice, though the time hung heavily on his hands until the physician re-appeared.

"I have spoken to the deacon about you, and he seems greatly concerned over your welfare. I could not think of letting you see him in his present state. But, as your condition is such

that something has got to be done at once, I will act for him a few days, until we can see how he gets along. Now say to me just what you have come here to say to him."

"I am sorry Deacon Cornhill is so sick," said Rob. "Is there nothing I can do for him?"

"You show a pretty unselfish spirit to think of some one else before yourself, considering the hopeless situation you are in. I do not think you can do anything for the deacon at present. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"We need tools, sir, to begin work on the land, and we want to find chances to work so we can earn money."

"Now you talk business. In regard to the first matter, I shall take the liberty to borrow of the deacon for you. In the second case I have got to do a little thinking. How many of you wish places, and what can you do?"

"There is Larry Little; he's eighteen and stout to do anything he knows about. Then there are Tom and Jerry, younger than he is, but they could do chores. Besides 'em there is myself, who is willing to try anything."

“None of you can know much about farm work. But I will see in a little while. First I will look after those tools, and I will take them along with you as far as I am going.”

Dr. Menter, who was considerable of a farmer himself, having spent his boyhood on a farm, went into Deacon Cornhill's tool house, soon coming out with two shovels, two hoes, an ax, and a pick-ax.

“These will be enough for you to begin with,” he said, with a smile as he placed them in his carriage.

As has been shown there were two roads leading to Break O' Day, and as Dr. Menter had another patient to visit in the west part of the town he advised Rob to ride with him in that direction and after leaving him to take what was called “The Flying Jump” road to Break O' Day. On the way the physician explained to Rob considerable about farming, and told him how to begin by spading up the ground ready for planting.

“Select the level places between the ridges and the hollows where the soil is richer and

deeper. There is some good land on Break O' Day, but there is more that is poor, either sandy or rocky. Let me advise you not to dig anywhere the grass won't grow."

So Rob went back to his humble home by the same road that 'Squire Hardy and Sheriff Stan-yan had taken in going to Break O' Day. He found his mother and friends anxiously awaiting his coming, excepting Chick and Ruddy who had not returned.

Rob gave as encouraging an account of his visit to the village as he could, and as he displayed the tools he had brought with which to begin work there was a curious examination made and many utterances of surprise which must have sounded ridiculous to the farming population of Basinburg. But it must be remembered that none of the younger members of the party had ever seen anything of the kind, or had the remotest idea of the uses to which they could be applied. Even Rob, who had listened attentively to what Dr. Menter had said, could not give any very clear explanation.

He believed the best illustration he could give

was to put them to use, and he at once looked about for the most suitable place to begin his farming!

“Come, Larry, here is a shovel for you. Tom and Jerry can each use a hoe.”

“Oh, my! won't that be fun?” cried the latter.

It was not surprising that the girls and even Mrs. Willet and Aunt Vinnie came out to witness the “breaking of the sod” for the new life.

But strange tools in new hands become awkward, and at the very outset Larry blundered and fell in a heap amid the clapping of hands and merry peals of laughter from his companions.

Picking himself up rather crestfallen Larry went at his task more judiciously than at first, so that in a few minutes he was doing nearly as well as Rob.

But it was hard work for these green hands, and though Little Hickory stuck to his task with commendable perseverance Larry soon tired of it. Tom and Jerry had gone off to chase a bird, and he could not see why he should toil so while

the others were enjoying themselves, so he threw his shovel into the bushes and followed after his younger companions.

Rob said nothing, keeping steadily at his work, soon turning over a good square sod.

Joe Willet having seen where Larry had flung his shovel went and got the tool, to begin herself to imitate Rob with a heart of good will.

“Stop, Joe!” said Rob, “this is no work for girls to do. There are enough of us boys to do this.”

“I wish I was a boy so I could,” she said. “A girl does not seem to amount to much out here. I am afraid—”

“You’re afraid of nothing, Joe. There is enough for you to do in the house.”

“I am afraid Larry does not like to work so well as you do, Rob.”

“P’raps he’ll do better next time, Joe. I did not want to scold him the first time. I don’t see where Chick and Ruddy are. I’m more anxious about ’em.”

This anxiety on the part of Rob increased as the afternoon wore away without seeing the re-

turn of the two boys, and just as the sun was sinking below the tree-tops on the west Rob shouldered his shovel and started towards the coal-camps with his companions, resolved to go in search of the missing ones.

“You’ll have supper first,” said his mother. “It is ready, and you must be tired.”

Rob could not deny this, though he said nothing about his aches and pains as he seated himself upon a rock to eat his plain supper of salt pork and brown bread from a piece of hemlock bark that he had picked up for a plate. Everything was in keeping with this forlorn condition, and to add to its dreary aspect his mother said:

“I don’t know what we shall do to-morrow, Rob, as there is not enough for all of us to live upon until the next day.”

“I shall—”

“Here comes some gemmens in a wagon!” cried Tony, running into the place at that moment.

Rob looked out to see a horse and wagon, the latter containing three men drawn up in front

of their home. That they boded him evil he was aware from the fact that one of the trio was 'Squire Hardy.

"So this is where you have landed," said the latter.

Rob made no reply, while he saw the other men get out of the wagon, and begin to drive a stake in front of the coal-camp, dealing lusty blows with an ax as the piece of wood sank deep into the earth. When this had become firmly set they produced a sheet of paper which Rob could see was covered with writing, and tacked it upon a strip of board, that was in turn nailed to the upright.

"What does this mean?" demanded Rob.

"Read for yourself, you New York vagrant," cried 'Squire Hardy, "and see if you will dare to defy the law any longer."

"It is quite likely he cannot read," said one of the other men, with a look around the scene.

"Well, read it to him and his precious brood," snapped the 'squire.

CHAPTER XV.

DEFYING A TIGER.

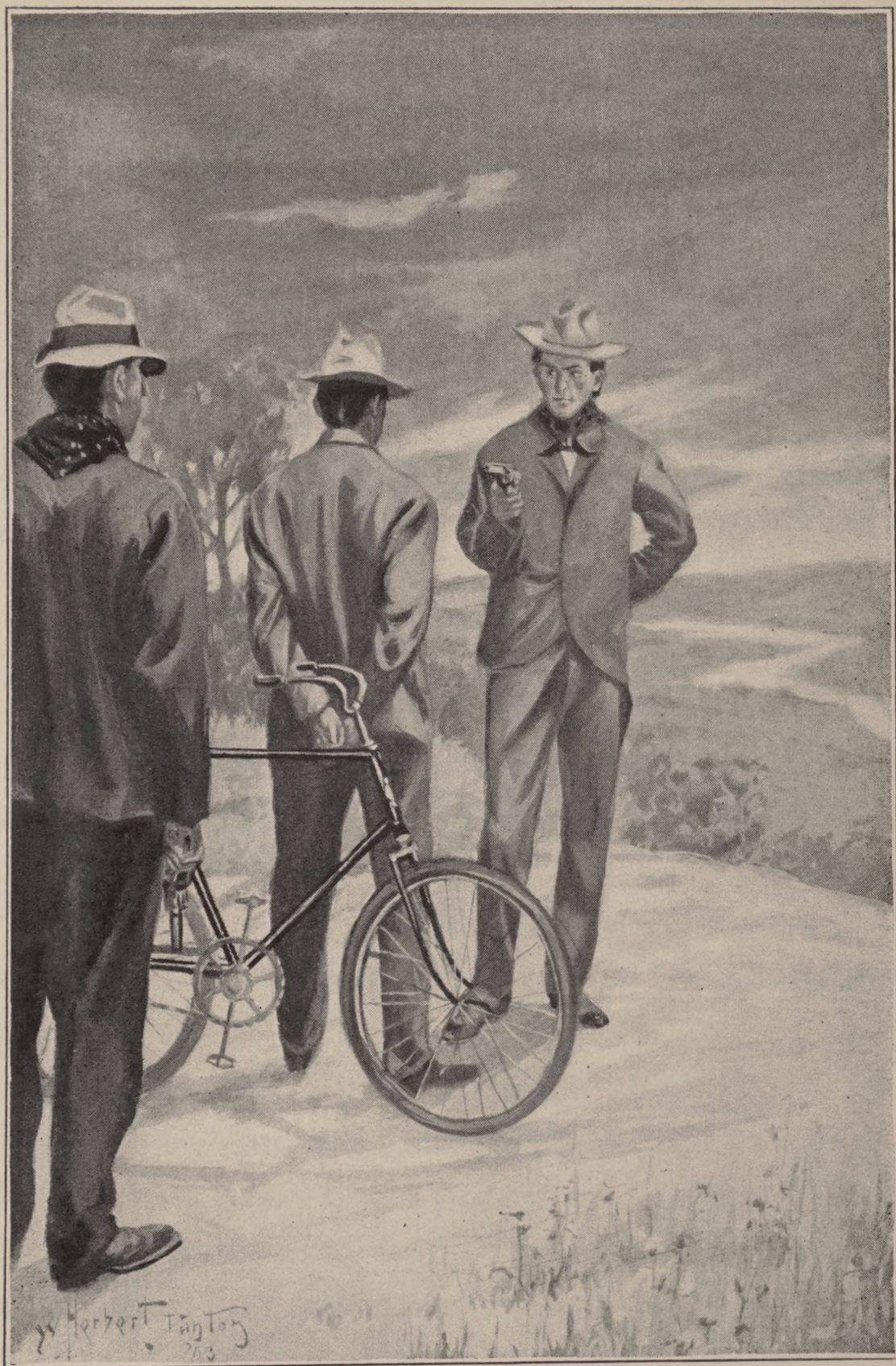
“It is a notice for you and your crowd to leave the town within twenty-four hours,” replied the man addressed, pointing to the paper he had just helped affix to the stake.

“And it is signed by these gentlemen, who are two of the selectmen of the town,” added ‘Squire Hardy, triumphantly. “Now I guess you’ll get. If you don’t the worst’ll be your own. We’ll show you that New York can’t dump her slums here.”

Rob offered no reply, and without further words the three men rode away, leaving a frightened and anxious group behind them.

“Oh, Rob!” cried Mrs. Bayne, “what shall we do? What shall we do?”

“Oh, why did we ever leave the city?” moaned Aunt Vinnie. “Why weren’t we satisfied with what we had?”



“Good,” exclaimed the spokesman of the twain, “ye act like a sensible chap.”

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"Aunt Vinnie," said Joe, stoutly, "I wouldn't go back to the city for all it holds. They can't kill us, and we'll get our living here somehow, won't we, Rob?"

"To be sure we will, Joe. Have courage, mother. Do not let 'em scare you, and they won't be able to drive you. I wish I knew where Chick and Ruddy are."

"What shall we do?" moaned Aunt Vinnie. "This terrible country will be the death of us."

While Rob was more concerned over the outcome of this last movement on the part of his enemy, he tried to appear cheerful, saying:

"They will not touch us for at least another day, and sometimes great things happen in twenty-four hours. Just now I am more anxious about Chick and Ruddy. I am afraid something has happened to 'em. I must go to the village again."

"Let Larry go with you," said Joe.

"You need him here more than I do. Never fear for me, Joe. I had hoped we might have got a better house to stop in before night, but the deacon being sick has put us all back. But

as soon as he is well we shall get ahead in shining shape."

With these hopeful words Rob started toward Basinburg village to find Chick and Ruddy if possible. Knowing that they had intended to come home by the east road he followed that way, and so rapidly did he walk, it being all down grade going that way, that in the course of half an hour he got nearly down to the village.

He had been disappointed in not meeting the boys, as he had hoped, and becoming more alarmed than ever over their strange non-appearance, he kept on toward the village.

Presently the houses on the distant hillside could be seen, and he came in sight then of the little collection forming the nucleus of Basinburg, Captain Jarvis's store, where the post-office was kept, forming the most conspicuous building.

Quite a crowd had gathered about this place, and the men seemed to be discussing some subject in an excited manner.

Fearless of any harm to himself Rob boldly

approached the group, with his eyes and ears open for whatever might happen. At first no one noticed him, so that he had got almost into the midst of the crowd before the friend of 'Squire Hardy called Trask exclaimed:

“Hi, youngster! If ye ain't a brazen chap I'll hoe taters for the deacon a week fer nothing, and that's the pizenest thing I could think of doing.”

Rob made no reply to this rude speech, but approached nearer the throng to find that neither he nor his friends, as he had half-expected at first, furnished the topic under discussion.

“They ain't far away, that's certain, and somebody will run ercross them kerslap like in a way that'll make their hair stand on end. Sich critters ain't forgot their 'arly ways if they have been under subject for a while.

“That's so, Dan,” said another. “Hilloa!” catching sight of our hero, “if here ain't a tiger o' different sort. What has brought you to town now?”

“He's come to look over the place to see

where to begin his thieving," spoke up some one in the background.

Unheeding this speech Rob said:

"I am looking for the boys who were with me this morning. Perhaps some of you can tell me if you have seen them."

"Do you mean the red-headed youngster with the freckled face and the peart little bantam with him?"

"I mean Ruddy and Chick. Ruddy has got red hair."

"Well, I guess we can tell what has become of them, can't we, Jones?" speaking to a companion. "If we can't Jackson, the chairman of the selectmen, can."

Restraining his vexation at this bit of insolence, Rob said in an even tone:

"As you seem to know I wish you would tell me so as to save me further trouble."

"I reckon they are down to the county farm by this time, seeing Bagley has got a good hoss and he wouldn't be likely to let any grass grow in the road with sich company," which speech was greeted by a cheer from the spectators.

At a loss how to act under the oppression of such an announcement Rob was silent. Then a commotion a short distance away caught the attention of all. A new-comer was saying:

“A part of the children have got home, but the doctor's girl and boy, with two others went over on Sander's hill and have not been seen since two o'clock. Some see them tigers up that way so the doctor and his family are scart to death over the children.”

“Come on, boys!” called out one of the spectators, “we must hunt 'em up. Get your guns and come on!”

In a moment Rob learned that all this excitement was occasioned by the escape of a couple of tigers from a menagerie the day before, the animals having been seen in that vicinity within a few hours. The danger to the missing children was apparent to every one. If they had not already met the ferocious beasts they were likely to do so at any moment.

But Rob felt that he had as much trouble on hand as he could meet at present, and after satisfying himself that Chick and Ruddy had act-

ually been taken to the county farm, he started homeward with a heavy heart.

About half a mile out of the village, where the road entered the woods at the foot of Break O' Day hill, he was startled at first by the wild, incoherent cries of a man, who seemed to be running toward him at a furious gait.

He had only to wait a moment before the frightened person burst into sight, hatless and coatless, his face as white as a sheet while he came down the road running for dear life.

"What is it?" asked Rob, as he came nearer.

"The—the—tig—er! he's killed the children and eaten 'em up!"

"Where are they?"

"Down in the clearing back—"

That was all Rob could catch, for the terrified wretch had not stopped in his wild flight, but was speeding on toward the village as if a hundred wild tigers were at his heels.

Without stopping to think of what the consequence might be to him, Rob bounded toward a clearing off on his right and which entered the woods like a huge wedge driven in from the open country.

He had not gone half a dozen rods before a shrill scream in a childish voice reached his ears.

He knew then he was going in the right direction.

A moment later he saw a sight which fairly froze the blood in his veins.

A short distance below him was a little group of children who had been gathering may-flowers, while crouching near them, where it had crept with the cunning and stealthiness peculiar to its race, was a huge tiger!

The cry of the frightened boys and girls had suddenly aroused its rage, and lashing the ground with its long tail, the infuriated brute was ready to spring upon its prey.

It was a situation where a moment's time means a life. Unarmed, as he was, Little Hickory could not stand idle while others were in such deadly peril.

Regardless of what the result might bring him, he picked up a small rock at his feet, and hurled it with all the force he could muster straight toward the springing tiger!

CHAPTER XVI.

A TUSSELE WITH A TIGER.

So well did Rob throw the stone that it struck the crouching tiger upon the back, when the brute uttered a fierce growl, which brought another scream from the frightened children that were clinging to each other a few feet away.

Fearing that his first shot had not drawn the attention from its intended victims, Little Hickory poised a second stone, sending it with such precision that it fell between the animal's ears with a resounding thwack.

Another shriek from the surprised tiger rang out, louder and fiercer than the first, when the creature wheeled furiously about to see who this assailant from its rear might be.

Rob had picked up another stone, and as the maddened beast faced him he threw it with all the power he could command.

But this time he missed his target, though the

tiger gave vent to its rage in another howl of anger, and whipped the ground with its long tail.

Rob now realized that the situation was a desperate one. The aroused brute was preparing to attack him, and in a hand-to-hand battle with the terrific animal he must be torn limb from limb.

Again he snatched up a stone, and hurled it with such unerring aim that it fell squarely upon the tiger's nose. But this fusillade, instead of checking the on-set of the brute, served to awaken its furious nature, and with another growl it leaped into the air, its forepaws outstretched to grapple with him, while its white teeth gleamed fiercely in the gathering gloom of the evening.

If Little Hickory had not possessed uncommon nerve and agility his career must have ended then and there, for there was deadly earnestness in this attack of the tiger, all of whose native ferocity had been awakened.

But never losing his presence of mind, Rob watched the movements of the angry beast in-

tently, and as its body darkened the air he sprang nimbly aside, so it just grazed his body to fall a couple of yards away sprawling on the greensward.

Knowing that the battle had but just begun, and to run away would be to incur certain death from the brute, Little Hickory quickly faced the animal, looking it squarely in the eye, while he slowly advanced instead of retreating.

The tiger showed that this bold defiance puzzled it if it did not for the time hold in check its wild passions. With a prolonged growl it crouched lower to the earth, and while its tail described circle after circle in the air, it watched intently the youth who fairly held it at bay by his superhuman bravery.

Still Little Hickory knew there must be a change in this situation before long. It seemed only a matter of how long he could hold the animal at bay. He had heard cries from the children, and he judged by such sounds as he had heard that they were fleeing from the place. Of course, it would not do for him to look around, or even to speak.

In the midst of this suspense a loud, commanding voice fell on the scene, and the words of the tiger's keeper rang out clearly on the silence of the startling tableau:

“Back, Leo! lie still!”

The tiger growled low and sullen, while its glaring eyes shifted from Rob to this newcomer, who had approached swiftly and silently to the spot, unseen and unheard by both our hero and the brute before him.

“Step aside, young man, but do not let your eyes leave him,” said the man. “I think I can manage him now. Down, Leo, down!”

Rob gladly moved backward, and at the same time the keeper, who carried in his hand a stout, heavy whip, advanced, repeating his command to the tiger.

The creature was in too ill humor to obey willingly. Perhaps the short period of freedom he had enjoyed had made him unwilling to return to his captivity. At any rate, he continued to lash himself into a rage, while the keeper slowly moved nearer.

“Back, Leo! back!” commanded the latter,

and to give greater impressiveness to his words he brought his heavy whip smartly about the body of the tiger.

The beast uttered a terrific growl, and as if goaded to desperation leaped straight at the throat of his one-time conquerer.

The spell of subjection was broken. Once more the wild, untamed and untamable spirit of the jungle asserted itself. The stern command, the crack of the whip, the flashing eye had no longer any terror for the aroused brute, and he cared only to devour his whilom master.

Little Hickory felt greater fear in witnessing this attack on his deliverer than when he had himself faced the angry creature. But the suspense was of short duration this time.

A quick movement of the right hand on the part of the keeper, the flash of powder, and the report of a firearm were closely followed by the death-cry of the doomed tiger, whose last leap ended with his frantic dying struggle.

"It was too bad, too bad," declared the man, as he watched the futile efforts of the brute to regain his feet. "He was a valuable animal,

but it was his life or mine, and mine was worth more to me."

"I was beginning to think it would be my life," said Rob, "but you came in good season."

"Ay, lad, you were in a tight box, but you showed true grit. Do you know, young fellow, there ain't one in ten thousand who could have stood up there as you did. I saw it all, but I knew it would precipitate a crisis if I made a move before I was near enough to hope for an effect. Say, if you will go with me I will guarantee you a position where you can earn good money and a good sized pile of it. What do you say?"

"I thank you, sir, but I cannot leave to do it."

"It will pay you. What do you say to a thousand a year to begin with?"

"I shall have to say no, sir. I wonder what became of those children."

"They have reached the village by this time. Ha! there come some of the town's people, and I'll warrant they will give you a kind word. You deserve it."

Without knowing what reply to make Rob

watched in silence the approach of the party from the village, among whom he saw Dr. Menter and 'Squire Hardy.

"Come right along and have no fear, gentlemen," said the voluble keeper. "The creature is powerless to harm you now."

The relief of the new-comers was shown by their actions as well as words, and when the slayer of the tiger came to describe how Rob had saved the lives of the children, one at least in the crowd was warm in his praise.

That person was Dr. Menter, whose children had been among those saved, and he grasped Rob's hand, saying fervently:

"Young man, I thank you from the depths of my heart. If you will come down to the house Mrs. Menter will join her thanksgiving with mine. You have done us a favor today which will take more than money to repay."

As these were the first really kind words Rob had heard since coming into Basinburg they gladdened his heart with uncommon joy, but he was too anxious to get home to accept Dr. Menter's urgent request to go home with him.

During this brief conversation Rob knew that the 'squire was watching them with baleful eyes, and when he started homeward, leaving the crowd still standing about the body of the dead tiger, he knew the other was glad of his rid-dance. He heard Dr. Menter say:

“Give that boy a chance and he will make a smart man.”

'Squire Hardy lost no time in replying:

“All rogues and cut-throats possess smartness. I am surprised, doctor—”

The rest was lost by Rob, nor did he hear the next remark of the physician, as he hastened on his way toward Break o' Day.

He had got about half way home, when he was surprised by a shuffling sound in the bushes by the roadside. His mind still alive to tiger fights, his first thought was naturally of such animals, and he looked about for some means of self-defence.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FRIENDLY CALLER.

At his second glance Rob caught sight of a boyish figure skulking in the growth, and recognizing a familiar figure he called out:

“Hilloa! is that you, Chick?”

“Shades of Cherry Corner!” replied the well-known voice of that boy, “it’s Little Hickory, Ruddy!”

The next moment the twain bounded head-first out into the road, Chick falling headlong in the middle of the highway.

“Where in the world have you come from?” asked Rob. “They told me you had been taken to the county farm.”

“Jess shows how the lunkheads were mistook. It’ll take a smarter gump ’n that countryman to get us there, eh, Ruddy?”

“Then they did try to take you there?”

“Ye jess lay your bottom rock on that, old Hick. But me and Ruddy ain't in fer no county farm—not yet!”

On being questioned more closely the two confessed that they had been started for the county farm, but that before reaching the place they had jumped from the wagon and managed to escape their guard.

“Golly gee!” exclaimed Ruddy, laughing till it seemed as if he would never stop, “we pretended to be awful green, and we got the old duffer to tell erbout everything we see. This tickled him to think he knowed so much more'n we did, and, by hookey! he'd stop to s'plain so much that we got tired.. Then, when he come to magnify the beauty of some birds so black and homely as to make yer laugh, we skid out! Shouldn't be s'prised if the old feller is there now a-chinning on 'em.”

While Little Hickory realized that this turn in affairs might not prove to their advantage in the end, he was secretly glad that his companions had escaped, and the journey to Break

o' Day was continued with a lighter heart than he had known since coming into this region. Somehow he felt that his adventure with the tiger was likely to redound to his good.

It must be understood that it was already dark, and by the time the coal-camps were reached it was well into the evening. They found their coming anxiously awaited by their friends, and their stories found eager and pleased listeners.

"What a hero you are getting to be, Rob," said Joe, proudly. "I guess they'll think you are somebody soon."

"But think of the narrow place he was in," said Rob's mother. "I tremble all over now to think of it."

"Let it pass, mother. I do not think I shall lose anything by it. At any rate I feel better than I did when I started down to the town, and I am going to look for better times."

Rob's hopefulness afforded comfort to the others, and the next morning found them all more light-hearted than they had been before in spite of the ominous notice at their door.

"I've a mind to tear it down," said Larry.

"Better save your strength to work that shovel in the sod, Larry," said Rob with a laugh. "You know yesterday—"

"I'm sore and lame now so I—hilloa! what's up?"

The exclamation was caused by the sudden appearance of Tom and Jerry, who appeared hatless, barefooted and very much out of breath.

"There's somebody coming here. He looks like a real gentleman. He—here he comes!"

In a moment great confusion and excitement reigned about the coal-camps, while the occupants swiftly disappeared from the scene with the exception of Rob, Larry and Joe Willet, though half a dozen heads soon appeared at the low doorways.

Rob's misapprehension quickly disappeared as he caught sight of the approaching person.

"Why, it's Dr. Menter," he said in a low tone, while in a louder voice he addressed the new-comer:

"Good morning, sir. I hope you are well,

and that it is not any bad news that you fetch to Break o' Day."

"In the name of goodness, are you living here?" demanded the physician, allowing his usual polite speech to be overcome by his surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"I supposed you were stopping in the red house. The deacon owns that."

"It wasn't convenient, sir, at the time."

"But these sod camps are not fit for a pig to live in, let alone human beings."

"We hope to get into better houses sometime, sir."

Dr. Menter had discovered the notice posted by the selectmen, and when he had hastily run it over he exclaimed:

"Have they gone as far as that? When was that put up?"

"Yesterday afternoon, sir."

"Well, well, that beats me. 'Squire Hardy is behind it. For some reason he does not like you, and I had rather have half of the town

against me than the 'squire. What do you propose to do about it?"

"We haven't decided yet, sir."

"Let me see! ha, that's it! I tell you what I would do inside of an hour. Move up into the old red house. That happens to stand over the line in another town, and I do not believe you will be troubled there. At any rate the authorities of Basinburg cannot disturb you as long as you do no harm inside its boundaries."

Rob was quick to catch upon this information, and it gave him a ray of hope immediately.

"You are very kind, sir, and we shall do as you say. But I do not know how we can get the sick ones up there."

"Got sick ones, have you? Let me see them. As I didn't come up here professionally, there will be no charge."

Dr. Menter here left his carriage, and while Chick stood by his horse he followed Rob into the camp where Mr. Little was suffering on his primitive couch. Upon entering the low, damp place the good physician could not refrain from uttering sundry ejaculations and comments on the dreary situation.

“A well man could not live here without being sick. I should judge, my dear man, that you had been living in some place just like this before. Yours is a bad case of low circulation, with rheumatism and its kindred complaints hanging over you. What you need more than medicine is fresh air and sunlight and cold water. Why, man, if you will take a cold-water bath, with a good smart rubbing with a coarse towel, every morning, get all the sun you can, and just drink in the rarefied air of Break o' Day for six months, I'll warrant you will be at work in the cabbage-patch with the boys.”

“God knows I wish I could, doctor.”

“God is willing you should if you will take his medicine. His medicine is cheaper than any other doctor's, too.”

Though the doctor spoke less enthusiastically of Mrs. Willet's condition, he spoke hopefully, and on the whole his visit was like a ray of sunshine in itself, and from that hour Dr. Menter was fairly worshipped by the older members of Ragged Rob's Young Republic.

The suggestion of a move to the old house

had found a ready response among the party, so Rob was beginning to carry out the idea. But what puzzled him most was how to move Mr. Little and Mrs. Willet, until Dr. Menter offered to take them there in his carriage. This was not a very difficult undertaking, and inside of an hour the removal was made complete.

“It is a sorry tenement to move into,” declared the doctor, “but it is a palace compared to those coal-camps, and you can soon make it quite comfortable. There is plenty of room for all of you at present. I see you are pretty short of provisions, which brings me to my real errand in coming up here.

“Mrs. Cornhill needs help about her work, now that the deacon is down with the fever, and if one of the girls will go and work for her a few weeks she will be well paid. Help is needed, too, on the farm, so there is a chance for one of the boys. The deacon is in a hard corner financially, but he pays his help. As he is too ill to look after such matters, I will advance you enough to set up housekeeping,”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE REBELLION AT BREAK O' DAY.

Dr. Menter's kind words brought the tears to more eyes than one among these waifs of humanity forming Ragged Rob's Young Republic, but they were tears of joy surging up from emotions too deep for utterance.

"May God bless you," said Mrs. Bayne, fervently, a prayer echoed by the others. "You are very kind, Dr. Menter, and I hope that you will get your pay for it."

"I should be less than human, my dear woman, did I not do this much, when I cannot forget that my two dear children at home owe their lives to Rob. He risked his life nobly to save them, and I will do all I can for him and his friends."

“You said Mrs. Cornhill wanted to get a girl to help her,” said Joe at this moment. “I will go, and the money I earn shall go toward helping make better the house here.”

“You are needed at home, Joe,” spoke up Mary Little. “Let me go. You know I am stronger than you.”

A short discussion followed, when it was decided that Mary should go, and she declared that she was ready to go at once.

“You can ride down with me,” said the doctor. “You will need different clothes, but I think Mrs. Cornhill will fit you out in fine shape. So jump in, and we will drive down there immediately. I will send you up a load of goods this forenoon, Rob.”

The little band of colonists could not refrain from watching the kind-hearted doctor until his carriage had disappeared behind a row of bushes growing by the roadside, when they turned to their task of putting their new home into better shape with a hearty good will.

Water was brought from a neighboring spring, and cleaning was begun, while Rob and

Tom and Jerry began to make such repairs in the way of fixing up doors and windows as they could. As little as they had to do with, before noon the old house presented a far more inviting appearance. But all this was new to the boys, and they soon tired of the work. Larry, though older and larger than even Rob, was the first to murmur.

"I didn't suppose we'd come out here to break our backs lifting and working," he said. "I don't know how the rest of ye feel, but I'd rather be back in Smoky Alley."

"Oh, you'll soon get used to it," replied Joe. "I think it is just delightful. I never felt so well in my life. Come, Larry, be somebody. See how Rob has worked, and he—"

"Of course you'd stand up fer Rob. Nothing he does is bad, but as fer me—"

"Hold your tongue, Larry! We don't want any grumbler in Break o' Day."

As the old red house was amply large for so many it was decided to divide into three families, though much of the work would have to be done together, particularly the cooking.

Mrs. Bayne and Rob, with the boys Chick, Ruddy and Tony, were to form one family; Mrs. Willet and Joe another; while the Littles, Aunt Vinnie and her "boys," Tom and Jerry, made up the third.

As the noon hour drew near, Aunt Vinnie, who was inclined to look on the dark side, began to bewail their condition if Dr. Menter should fail to send the supplies as he had promised. But this was useless talk, as grumbling generally proves to be, for at last the team came fairly loaded. How the boys shouted, while the older members felt quite as jubilant! There were edibles, such as potatoes, flour, apples, etc., with a table, chairs, two beds, and cooking utensils of various kinds, and a second-hand stove. Besides these articles, every one of which seemed so valuable to the destitute ones, were some boards with which to make repairs, a saw, plane, hammer, and some nails.

The man who brought this load said but little, though he eyed the colonists with a curious gaze.

"The doctor told me to say that the feller who

is to help the deacon will be expected tomorrow morning. Work is awfully behind at the deacon's. But there, I don't s'pose it matters much with him, as they say the doctor has given't up hope of him getting up ag'in."

Rob heard this bit of news with a sorrowful heart, and promised he would be promptly on hand the next day.

As he would be away after that day, and not be able to attend to the work on the land, Rob felt anxious to make a beginning that afternoon, so he asked Larry to take hold with him. This the latter did reluctantly, while Tom and Jerry positively refused to work. Already Rob was beginning to feel that right at home he was likely to have serious trouble. Still he did not feel that the time had come for him to express himself as he would liked to have done.

Larry took his shovel and began work by the side of Rob, though he moved slowly and did his work so poorly that little Hickory said nothing when finally he threw down the tool, saying:

"I'm too tired to work today."

Rob kept steadily at his task until nearly sun-

set, and having the satisfaction of knowing he had quite a patch spaded up, he was about to start toward the house, when he saw a horse and wagon approaching.

The occupants of the wagon were the two selectmen, who had posted up the notice for them to leave Basinburg that day.

“What are you doing here?” demanded the spokesman, as he stopped his horse that began to nibble at the grass as soon as its head was free.

“At work, sir, getting ready to do a little planting as—”

“Weren't you ordered to move out these regions, young man?”

“We have moved, sir,” replied Rob, calmly.

The chairman of the board of selectmen was about to reply, when his companion touched him on his arm, and a hurried consultation took place between them. Just what they said Rob was unable to tell, but he knew well enough that it had reference to their present situation, for at its conclusion the twain drove away without speaking to him again.

“P’raps you’ve learned where you are,” said Rob to himself, as he went to the house, where he found the best supper awaiting him that he had ever eaten in his life, his recent work having given him an appetite he had never felt before.

It was a happy company of friends that rested under the old red house roof that night, even if the majority of them slept on pallets of straw.

The following morning Rob was astir early, feeling pretty sore after his work of yesterday, but the sun was not very high when he reached the home of Deacon Cornhill to begin his first day’s real work.

He learned that the deacon was very ill. He did not see Mary, but was told that she was getting along very well with her work.

It would be tedious, perhaps, to describe the events of the following week. But it showed considerable advance in certain lines with the colonists of the young republic. Rob worked every day at Deacon Cornhill’s, going home to Break o’ Day every night and returning in the morning. This made it harder for him, but

he felt that he was needed to look after matters at home.

This was made doubly important from the fact that Larry, Tom and Jerry, with the smaller boys showed no disposition to begin work. Joe had bravely undertaken to spade up the ground to be planted, until Rob had requested her to stop. On Saturday, a day that will never be forgotten by the members of the young republic, Rob stayed at home to begin the garden, which needed attention.

"Come, boys," he said, cheerily, "lend a hand. The garden must be made ready to plant."

The others made no reply, Larry taking the shovel and following reluctantly.

"I've found a place easier to dig up," he said finally, as Rob approached the place where he had begun digging.

Tom and Jerry were sulking in the background.

"I think this is the best place," replied Rob to Larry, who had already started to a sand-bank a few rods away. Upon reaching this place

Larry began work, his shovel sinking its length into the light earth.

"Let's see who can shovel the most," said he.

"It will do no good to work there," replied Rob, who could see that a crisis was at hand.

"I ain't going to dig in that hard, rocky ground when there is sich easy stuff as this."

"But nothing 'll grow there," said Rob. "Dr. Menter said so."

"I don't keer what you nor Dr. Menter says, I reckon I'll dig where I'm a mind to. Ye needn't think, Rob Bayne, thet ye are going to boss me, fer ye ain't and the sooner ye know it the better."

"I shall be sorry to have any trouble with you, Larry, and I've no wish to boss you, but I say ag'in it is no use to dig in that sand."

"I dig here or nowhere," gritted Larry, glowering upon his companion fiercely. "I s'pose ye think ye are guv'ner here, and not one o' us dare to yip. But I want ye to onderstand that I'm older and bigger'n ye, and that I hev got more backers 'n ye hev. Come, Tom, Jerry, Chick, Ruddy and Tony, and help me show Rob

Bayne he ain't guv'ner here if he does feel so big. We'll lick him or bu'st the guv'ment!"

Larry threw aside his shovel, and as the other boys stepped quickly forward, he advanced swiftly toward Little Hickory with both fists doubled up and a dark, malignant scowl on his features.

He showed in every look and action that he meant a bitter fight, which Ragged Rob had neither the inclination or the opportunity to escape, however hazardous it might prove to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FIGHT TO A FINISH.

The three smaller boys, Chick, Ruddy and Tony, who had hastened to the side of Larry at his call, now that they really understood the situation, quickly stepped away as Larry advanced toward Rob.

“Golly!” exclaimed the irrepressible Chick, “there’s going to be some fun. I’ll put my money on Little Hickory.”

“He ain’t so big as Larry,” replied Ruddy, doubtfully.

“This ain’t no quarrel of mine, Larry,” said Rob, “and if you get the worst of it you mustn’t blame me.”

“Who’s a blaming ye, Rob Bayne, and who’s getting the wust of it?” retorted the other. “It’s high time we knowed who’s boss here.”

“If we settle it in this way, Larry, will you agree to stand by the consequences?”

“You bet I am. I reckon I’m taller and bigger and stouter, and jess as spry. Oh, I’m itching all over to get at ye. Ye show ye are ’fraid of me! I reckon there ain’t no cops round here to meddle, and I’ll hev the fun of my life with ye. But if I whup ye I’m to be gov’ner. Is thet yer say, Little Hickory?”

“Yes, Larry, but if ye get—”

The other did not wait for him to finish, but sprang forward with the evident intention of overpowering Rob before he could defend himself. But Rob was not to be caught off his guard so easily. Warding off the blow aimed at his body, Little Hickory fairly lifted his adversary from his feet by a dexterous movement under the other’s guard, to send him flat upon the ground.

Chick cheered, but the rest looked on as if spellbound.

Larry was soon on his feet again, to find Rob calmly confronting him, with his arms folded

low down upon his body in the favorite position of the professional pugilist.

“Ye took me unawares!” cried Larry. “I’ll down ye to pay for thet, and once I get my knee on ye I’ll choke the blood out’n ye!”

It would have been better for Larry to have said less, and tried more to curb his anger. But he advanced more warily this time, making several feints to the right and left, when thinking he saw Little Hickory’s front exposed he concentrated all his strength to deal him a blow that should send him upon his back.

No doubt he would have done it had he hit Rob. But he had mistaken the maneuvers of Little Hickory. The latter had purposely offered this apparent opportunity, and then as Larry threw himself into the attack he sent his arm upward, and planted his own fist under the other’s chin with a force that made his teeth chatter and sent him reeling backward.

Larry managed to save himself, and then he called for assistance by crying to his companions:

“Come on, Tom and Jerry! gi’n him fits.”

These boys evidently felt it their duty to help defend their companion, for they rushed to his assistance, both of them seizing upon Rob from the rear.

Assailed on every hand it began to look as though Little Hickory would have more than he could attend to. But he was not one to give up. Giving the twain behind a tremendous kick, which sent Jerry flying heels over head into the dirt, he closed in with Larry.

By that time the outcries had reached those at the house, and Joe, Mrs. Bayne and Aunt Vinnie all came running to the scene, excited over the rather startling situation.

Unheeding them or their cries Little Hickory continued to struggle with Larry, while the other two boys, Jerry having recovered himself, lent their assistance as best they could.

Aunt Vinnie called for her boys to come away, and Rob's mother appealed to him to desist. Joe Willet was alone silent. She had seen that Larry was discontented and jealous of Rob's influence, and better than the others knew that it would not be overcome in any other way than

to show him he was not master by brute strength. She would fain have assisted Rob, but saw no way of doing it. It would be better, too, for Rob to win his victory alone, if he could win it at all.

So the four boys—three against one—struggled to and fro, back and forth. Larry had seized on Rob's collar with a grip he could not break, while Tom and Jerry were pulling at his legs, and trying by all means in their power to trip him.

Finally Little Hickory managed to get his hand on the collar of Tom, when the latter suddenly found himself lifted up and ranged by the side of Larry. Then, with his right hand on the shoulder of Larry, he suddenly brought the heads of the two boys together with a force which filled the air about them with stars, and caused them to utter involuntary cries of pain.

At that moment Jerry succeeded in pulling one foot from under Rob, and the latter was forced down upon one knee, when it seemed as if Larry and Tom, who had rallied, would crush him to the ground.

“It’s a shame!” cried Joe, running forward to lend her assistance to Little Hickory. “Three to one—”

By this time the blood of Little Hickory was up, as the expression goes, and half a dozen boys like Tom and Jerry could have availed naught against him. A smart kick sent Jerry flying a rod away, where he lay cramped with pain, and uttering piteous cries, as Rob bore both Tom and Larry backward to the earth, a hand about the throat of either.

“Oh—oh—oh!” groaned the pair in unison. “You’re—choking me!”

Now that he had obtained an advantage Little Hickory resolved not to let either up until he had obtained an acknowledgement of submission from both.

Thus he pressed still harder upon them, as he said in his low, determined tone:

“Ye have lost, Larry! I’m too much for all of ye. What are ye going to do about it?”

But Larry remained silent, his stubborn nature not allowing him to yield at once. Again Rob made his demand, in his suppressed excite-

ment falling into the slang of the streets which he had dropped to a considerable extent since coming to Break o' Day. His fingers closed harder upon the other's throat.

Larry made a painful cry, and made a move as if he would rise.

"Do ye cave to me, Larry? Nod yer head if ye mean it."

The eyes flashed, but his head did not move.

"Ye are true grit, Larry, but ye shall never get onto yer feet till ye hev promised to do as I want ye to after this, or else go away from Break o' Day. Are ye ready to answer?"

Another spueeze, and the head of Larry nodded slightly.

"Hev ye got yer answer ready, Tom?"

The latter nodded quickly.

Then, as Little Hickory loosened simultaneously his hold on the throats of his assailants, he said:

"Mind ye, boys, no treachery. I hev asked ye a square question. Are ye going away from Break o' Day or stay?"

"I'm going to stay," muttered Larry.

“And do as I say?”

“I knuckle, Little Hickory. I thought I could whup ye, but ye are too menny fer us all.”

“And ye, Tom and Jerry?”

“I’m with ye, Rob,” replied both.

“Good,” said Little Hickory, though there was no sign of triumph in his manner as he stepped back. “I’m glad you are going to stay.”

“So am I,” said Joe, taking Larry’s hand. “You made a good fight, Larry, and I like you better for it, now that you are all right. It is only right Little Hickory should be at our head. We’ll agree to mind him in all he says.”

Larry made no reply, though the others knew well enough the victory had been fully won by Little Hickory. Chick would have given three cheers and a tiger or two, but the conqueror stopped him.

CHAPTER XX.

WAYLAID.

Little Hickory had no further trouble among his companions at Break o' Day. If reluctant at first, Larry went to work beside him in spading up the ground, and that very afternoon they planted their first seed. To these foundlings of the great city this was an event little to be appreciated by those brought up in the country. All but Mrs. Willet and Mr. Little joined the planters, Joe having the honor of dropping the seed into the "hills."

That evening Dr. Menter paid them a short visit, and when he found how the garden had been begun, he promised to arrange so that a man with a pair of horses and a plow should come up the first of the following week to help out the boys in their spading. He had also

found a situation for Larry, which the latter accepted after a little hesitation.

The visit of the genial doctor lent additional inspiration to the hearts of the members of the young republic, and when he had gone, the three families met together, at Larry's suggestion, and there in the presence of them all he took the hand of Rob, saying:

"Little Hickory, you deserve your name, and I was a fool for trying to lick you. Now if ye'll let that be forgot I'll stand by ye after this."

"I do," replied Rob, fervently. "You have got the right stuff in you, Larry, and I know we shall get along first rate."

"I'll do my part, Little Hickory, and you know I never fergit."

Larry was noted among his friends for his wonderful memory, and though he did not realize it then, it was a gift that was going to help him in times to come.

Jos took his hand cordially, and thanked him for his generosity. And Joe's thanks were worth all of the others to him.

So the little band forgot their enmities and

that evening at least were happy. Already both the invalids declared that they were feeling better, and they looked forward to the time when they should be fully recovered.

The four weeks that followed were uneventful. 'Squire Hardy seemed to have forgotten his enmity, though if Rob ever met him he scowled darkly upon him, and turned away. The authorities of the town in which the old red house stood ignored entirely the new inhabitants within their jurisdiction.

Thus the close of this month of peace to the young republic found Rob still working for Deacon Cornhill, who was lingering with a slow fever from which it would take him many weeks more before he could fully recover. Little Hickory continued to go home every night, and during the odd moments that he could get he assisted the small boys in the task of caring for the growing crops.

Jos was really the master spirit at home now, and the stranger must have been struck by the new phase of life taken on at Break o' Day. The old house had been repaired, cleaned and so

altered in appearance that it presented a look of comfort if not of comeliness. Just below the smooth green yard, the scene of the settlement of the mastery between Little Hickory and Larry Little, was a garden of fresh-growing plants which was a source of unlimited pride and pleasure to the dwellers in the old house.

Dr. Menter had proved a true prophet in the case of Mr. Little and Mrs. Willet. The former was already able to sit in the doorway on warm, pleasant days, enjoying both the sunshine and the country air. Mrs. Willet, very much to Joe's joy, was in the habit of sitting by one of the windows, the color coming back to her countenance and the strength to her tired body, due largely to the pure air and the sunshine.

One cloud now rested on their everyday lives. Dr. Menter had bade them good-bye for several months, while he took a much needed vacation in Europe.

"This seems too good to last," declared Aunt Vinnie, who seemed always looking for the clouds.

"Let us enjoy the sun while we may, auntie,"

said Joe in her buoyant way. "See how beautifully it is setting behind yonder rim of mountains. It makes me in love with the country, and I never want to see the hot, dusty city again. I don't see what makes Rob so late to-night. He thought he would get home early."

Perhaps it is well we cannot know what is taking place beyond our sight, or light-hearted Joe would have shuddered at that moment over the fortunes of her youthful lover.

Let us see what Rob is doing at this moment.

In going back and forth between Break o' Day and the home of Deacon Cornhill he had found the west route by way of the "Flying Jump" his best course, it being nearly a mile shorter though more broken at places.

Rob had not been at work many days for Deacon Cornhill before he found there was a second-hand bicycle left by a nephew, and which Mrs. Cornhill, who was overcoming her prejudice for him, kindly loaned to Little Hickory. In the morning he found his wheel of considerable help to him, though in returning to his home he had to walk more than half the way.

On this particular evening when Joe was so light-hearted and not a cloud had been discovered on the horizon of the young republic, Rob was climbing one of the long ascents leading to Break o' Day wheeling his bicycle along beside him as he slowly advanced.

About midway in the ascent was that wild section of the route called "The Flying Jump," where the mountain road after hanging for several rods on the very brink of a high precipice took a sudden turn and descended with dizzy abruptness into a narrow dark ravine, to rise on the other side with equal steepness.

A noisy stream wound through the lonely valley at places finding a difficult passage, so at high water it would overflow the gorge to a considerable depth.

Little Hickory always walked this portion of his route, and at this time he had barely reached the western summit, and was casting swift glances over his wild surroundings, when he was suddenly confronted by two men, who had stepped silently from the thicket overhanging the road.

It was evident that they had both been lying in wait for him, for simultaneously with their appearance both drew revolvers, and pointing the deadly weapons at Bob's head, one of them cried out in a sharp tone:

“Throw up yer hands, youngster, or yer life ain't worth a dead rabbit's hide!”

Though taken completely by surprise, Little Hickory realized that he was at the mercy of these bold villains, and accordingly he did as he was bid, at the same time allowing his bicycle to rest against his body.

“Good!” exclaimed the spokesman of the twain, “ye act like a sensible chap. It pays to know when ye are knocked under. See what he carries in his pocket, Jed.”

The waylayer addressed lowered his weapon and stepped forward to carry out the order of his companion, as he did so for a moment coming between his accomplice and their victim.

It was Little Hickory's golden opportunity.

Quick as a flash he dealt the ruffians each a tremendous blow with his fists, sending them

staggering back into the bushes, with exclamations of terror.

He had barely accomplished this feat and was about to follow up his advantage by seizing their weapons and thus turning the tables upon them by using these revolvers against his enemies, when a pistol shot came from the growth, and a bullet whistled so close to his head that it cut away a lock of hair.

An oath followed the report of the weapon, when a hoarse voice cried out:

“Quick, lads! nab the fool chap afore he gets away!”

A crash in the bushes succeeded another shot, and Little Hickory knew he was in the midst of enemies thirsting for his blood.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STARTLING PREDICAMENT.

As this was an eventful evening in the fortunes of the colonists of Break o' Day, and it is best to keep as square a front as is possible with the date, it seems necessary to record at this time a peculiar incident which befell another member of the party. If not as serious a situation as that of Little Hickory's, it held enough of horror and terror to satisfy at least the participant.

Larry Little upon finding that Rob was his master in the athletic trial, like a sensible boy that he was, quietly accepted the situation and became a loyal follower of him whom he could not lead. Some are born to be rulers, it would seem, while others must content to be followers. It is needless to say that the latter class is quite as essential and fully as creditable as the first.

Larry had gone to work for a Mr. Howlitt on a farm just out of the village, and did not return to his home at night, as Rod did. If he found farm work pretty hard at first, and he blistered his hands, went to bed at night with an aching back, felt tired and sleepy in the morning, he did not murmur very loud. He had taken hold in earnest, resolved to make the most of it.

Mr. Howlitt was a well-to-do farmer, having one other hand to help him besides Larry. He had no boys of his own, but this deficiency was more than made up, as Larry soon came to think, by having a most charming daughter.

Lucy Howlitt was an exceedingly pretty girl in her seventeenth year, and what was better a very sensible one. If Larry had felt a deep yearning for Joe Willet longer than he could remember, this affection was transferred inside of two weeks to Lucy Howlitt, and he was happy. That is, Larry would have been happy if he had been sure that he was the one favored by her.

Unfortunately for his peace of mind, he had a rival. What seemed to be worse for him, this

aspirant for the very smiles and friendship that he coveted was an audacious, educated, quick-witted, well-dressed youth, who was the son of a rich man and who was at that time studying law with the purpose of practicing that profession. But with all this in his favor he was an arrant coxcomb, and favorite with only a small circle of acquaintances.

His name was Pluto Alexander Snyder, as he invariably signed it, giving a sort of double twist to the S and an unmeaning curl underneath the whole signature.

Larry sized him up as a snob, but trembled in the fear that he was likely to lose in the race against such a competitor. To add to his discomfiture Pluto Snyder, who was at least three years older than Larry, was raising a mustache, though he had not yet succeeded in coaxing a growth of over half a dozen hairs under each nostril. As these were of a very light color they did not make a very strong impression.

As for the young law-student it should be said Larry's presence did not for a moment disturb his peace of mind. In fact, he did not consider

the "ragged boor" worth the dignity of being considered a rival for the hand of the sweet Lucy Howlitt, forsooth!

Larry had at least one opportunity to display his superiority over his supercilious rival, even if it was in an humble manner.

Pluto Snyder lived in an adjoining town, though less than a mile and a half away, and it was his delight to take Lucy out to ride on pleasant afternoons whenever she would go, which was unnecessarily often to the watchful Larry. But if priding himself upon being able to drive a horse upon the road, Pluto had never mastered the intricacies of that common wearing apparel of the animal known as the harness. The terms of hames, saddle, girth, bits, etc., were less understood by him than the expressions of Blackstone were to the poor boy digging in the field by the roadside with a load on his heart which troubled him more than his hard work.

Thus one day, as he was returning from one of those pleasure trips accompanied by Miss Howlitt, by some means the girth became un-

buckled, and descending a hill at that time the thills of the wagon were thrown up so that the horse was frightened, and threatened to run. Pluto, more alarmed than the animal, shouted for it to stop and pulling on one rein steered the horse into the ditch.

The horse grew more unmanageable, and the driver leaped to the ground forgetful of his companion, while he continued to make his frantic cries.

By this time Lucy was frightened, and her cries were added to those of her companion, though she did not jump from the wagon.

Fortunately Larry was working in the adjoining field in company with Job Wescott, the hired man, and he ran to the assistance of the couple, followed by Job.

Though himself a novice in the matter of harnesses, Larry called out for young Snyder to stop pulling on the reins. He then ran to the horse's head, and led it back to the road.

Job then reached the spot, and seeing the girth dangling in the air, buckled it, and looked

the harness over without discovering any other difficulty.

“Blamed ijit!” he said, “if you had as much sense as the hoss and let him take his own way you’d come out better.”

This nettled Pluto, who exclaimed loudly:

“If I don’t know as much as such a clodhopper as you are I’ll hoe weeds all day the Fourth, and you may go in my place to make the oration at Gainsboro.”

“Drat my pictur’ if I couldn’t shout to more purpose ’n you can I’d send a calf in my place,” muttered Job, starting back into the field in a high dudgeon.

Pluto Snyder was climbing back into the wagon, and he had no sooner gained his seat than he called out in his loud voice for Larry to let go of the horse’s bridle.

“Don’t let go,” plead Lucy, “please lead him to the foot of the hill.”

The animal was still restive, and even Pluto did not offer further objection to Larry’s assistance, now that he had some one else to share the responsibility with him.

When the foot of the descent had been reached and the horse, under ordinary conditions a very quiet creature, seemed to have got over its fright, Larry released his hold and stepped aside to let the wagon pass.

“Please accept my thanks for your help, Lawrence,” said Lucy, with a smile. She always called him by his full name. “I do not know what we should have done if it had not been for you.”

“Don’t give the lunkhead more credit than he deserves,” said Pluto Alexander. Then, seeming to feel that he ought to make some acknowledgment to his rescuer, he turned back to say:

“Quite clever in you, young fellow. You can come over to Gainsboro and hear my oration on the Fourth.”

Larry made no reply, though he did not return to the field until the wagon and its occupants had disappeared around a bend in the road.

“It don’t take much of a block to make a fool,” said Job, as Larry rejoined him. “Quite

clever in him to allow you th' privilege of goin' to hear him orate."

"What does he mean?" asked Larry.

"Oh, jess that he's going to stump th' crowd at the Fourth celebration at Gainsboro. I sh'u'd like to know what fool got him to 'orate,' but I s'pose his dad got him the chance, which it were easy to do with his money."

"D' you s'pose Lucy will ever marry him?" Larry asked before he could realize what he was saying.

"I dare say; money cuts a mighty big figger with some."

Larry dropped the conversation there, but the thought of the coming Fourth of July celebration remained with him all the afternoon.

"I s'pose he will take Lucy there," he mused, "and he will cut a big swell. I wish I could take her with me," and then frightened by the mere thought he hoed away at the grass and weeds with such force that Job called out to him to "go easy afore ye get tuckered."

A few days later Larry fairly frightened himself by saying to Lucy that he wished he could

go to Gainsboro the Fourth. She seemed almost as surprised as himself, saying:

“It would be nice, Lawrence, but have you any clothes to wear?”

Seeing his confusion she bit her lip for saying as much, and ran away to be by herself. He sought the companionship of Job, feeling very crestfallen. Still it would look as if good was to come of this little incident, for within a week Mr. Howlitt said to Larry:

“How would you like a day off, eh, Larry? You have been a faithful boy, and to-morrow I am going to Middletown to look over the market, so that you may go too by driving Old Jerry over with a load of truck. I am owing you a little money, and if you want to it will be a good time for you to get a suit of clothes. I do not know how the minx knows it, but Lucy thinks you would like to go to Gainsboro on the Fourth.”

Larry wondered if his blushes showed through his coat of tan, as he stammered his reply.

Larry's enjoyment of that trip to Middletown was doubled when he found that Lucy was to

accompany her father. He received another pleasant surprise when Mr. Howlitt placed ten dollars in two new crisp bills in his hands as soon as the load of farm products had been sold.

"Do with it as you wish, lad," he said, and Larry lost no time in hastening to a ready-made clothing store where he bought him a new suit of clothes, even to shoes and underwear. It took all of his money, and the outfit was a plain one, but serviceable, and it is safe to say that Larry will never buy another which will give him half the pleasure of that one.

On his way home, and he started some time ahead of Mr. Howlitt and Lucy, as "Old Jerry" was a slow horse under ordinary circumstances, he could think of nothing else. Time and again he took up the bundle to examine it from the outside, and then toss it back into the bottom of the wagon, saying over to himself:

"It is mine!"

Finally the idea entered his busy brain that it would be a fine thing to appear at home in his new suit. Why not put it on now? He was riding along a road where there was no house

for a long distance, and he would risk meeting a team. Accordingly, almost before he realized what he was doing, he had stripped off his old coat, and never thinking in his wild exuberance of spirit that he might ever need to wear it again, flung it down in the rear of the wagon.

“Lay there, old coat, and may you rest in peace!”

Casting hasty glances up and down the road to see that no team was in sight, he sent one after another his remaining garments besides this coat, until he stood in the wagon as unclothed as at the time of his birth!

Anxious now to don his new suit he reached down in the wagon to take up the bundle, when to his horror he could not find it!

It had been jostled out of the wagon and was gone!

In the midst of this startling plight the sound of carriage wheels behind him caught his attention. Glancing wildly backward he found that he was being followed by the last persons on earth that he would care to meet at that time—Pluto Snyder and Lucy Howlitt!

CHAPTER XXII.

A FOURTH OF JULY "ORATION."

It would be impossible to describe the dismay of Larry Little as he found that he was followed by Pluto Snyder and Lucy Howlitt, who was laughing and apparently enjoying herself.

Fortunately for Larry he had prudently ducked himself down behind the wagon seat at the same moment he had looked around at the sound of the approaching team.

What could he do in that sorry plight?

He cried to old Jerry, but he knew the clumsy farm-horse would prove no match for the spirited animal driven by his rival.

As if to add to his horror the latter was driving at a smart gait, and he was rapidly overtaking him.

In vain he urged Old Jerry on.

He was in for it!

In his agony he thought of jumping from the wagon, let the consequence be what it might. But that would only add to the worst side of his foolish adventure. There was no escape for him!

In this horrible dilemma, while continuing to urge Old Jerry on, he caught up the oil-cloth Mr. Howlitt had thrown over the load of produce, and wrapped this hastily about his form. Then, speaking coaxingly for Jerry to slacken his gait, he kept his arms concealed as much as possible, and waited desperately for the others to pass.

Larry's awful suspense was of short duration, for in a minute Pluto and his fair companion came dashing alongside.

"Old Jerry seems to be wide-awake," greeted Lucy, who did not seem to realize the real situation, "so I thought we should not overtake you. I think you must have lost a bundle out of your wagon, for I saw this by the wayside, and made Mr. Snyder stop and pick it up."

With these words she tossed into the market

wagon at Larry's feet the bundle containing his new clothes.

He dared not stoop to pick it up, and he was too confused and bewildered to make the grateful acknowledgment that he felt in his heart like doing.

"Father will soon be 'long,'" said Lucy, as she and her companion rapidly left poor Larry behind. "I met Mr. Snyder in Middletown and he wanted—"

The rest was too indistinct for Larry to understand, but it did not matter. The fearful ordeal was over, his new clothes safe, and he felt like shouting in his joy. Now that he had come to himself he began to see how foolish he had been.

"I had no business to do it," he said.

He then prepared to array himself properly before any one else should come along. Picking up his discarded garments, he went back into the woods where he could put them on with less chance of being interrupted.

Upon reaching Mr. Howlitt's Larry could not help imagining that every one was thinking of

his recent escapade, and he went about his work in a confused way. Somehow he did not dare to show his new clothes, so he carried them to his room when no one was looking. But he was not to keep his secret long, if it could be called a secret, for the next morning he was questioned in regard to them. It proved that his employer had given him the money in the way he had in order to see what he would do with it.

"I will tell you, papa," said Lucy, "for I think Lawrence is too modest to do so. He has a new suit of clothes, and I think we ought to see how they look on him, don't you?"

So Larry was persuaded to try on his new suit, and while he felt in a most uncomfortable frame of mind, the clothes were declared to be a good fit, and well worth the money.

"I see no reason now why you cannot attend the Fourth at Gainsboro," said Mr. Howlitt, with a laugh.

"I mean to, sir," replied Larry, though he little dreamed under what circumstances.

A few days later, as he and Job were at work in what was called "the further field," on their

way home they overheard some one talking in a loud tone in an old barn standing some distance from the road.

Drawn thither out of curiosity they looked into the building through one of the cracks between the boards, to find Pluto Alexander Snyder there reciting a "piece" with all the gusto at his command.

"By gum!" whispered Job, "if he ain't oratin' his Gainsboro stump speech he may hitch me up to draw the cultivator 'tween the corn rows to-morrer. Ain't he a squelcher?"

Unconscious of his intent listeners Pluto, the embryo lawyer, continued to practice on his "oration," going entirely through the speech twice, and dwelling upon what he considered its finest points over and again.

"If that don't set out John Howlitt's eyes, I don't know what will," he said to himself. "When he hears this Fourth of July oration of mine he will think I am fit to associate with his daughter. As if the Howlitts were anywhere near as good as the Snyders!"

Job had hard work to keep from laughing out-

right while he listened, and as soon as they were a safe distance from the old barn, he laid down on the ground and rolled and roared till he was completely out of breath.

“Did you ever see th’ beat of thet, Larry? Say, my boy, if you could orate like that your fortun’ would be made, ha-ha-ha!”

“I believe I can, Job. Now listen.”

Then to the amazement of his companion Larry Little repeated the “oration” of Pluto Snyder’s from beginning to end. He may have made some mistakes, but they were of small account, and Job listened with open-mouthed astonishment.

“By gum!” exclaimed Job after a long pause, “how in creation did you do that? Jess as Pluck Snyder had it word fer word e’en to the flourishes. Could yer do thet ag’in?”

“Of course I could, Job. It was always easy for me to remember.”

“If I had a hang-on to my memory like thet I’d make my fortin, see if I wouldn’t.”

As Larry and Job were working up that way the next day they took time to call at the old barn, to find Pluto Snyder already there going

through his daily rehearsal, listened to by his unseen audience with poorly concealed delight. Nor was that the last time the amused twain sought their post to listen, for they continued to do so until they tired of it, and Larry could repeat every word and gesture. To prove this he went through the entire "oration" before Job the day preceding the Fourth.

Though Larry had got his new suit of clothes, he knew that Lucy had promised to go to Gainsboro with young Snyder so he spared himself the humiliation of being refused.

In his disappointment he donned his best clothes, and though Mr. Howlitt had intended for him to ride along with the family, he went on foot and alone, "the same as the girl who went to get married."

The day was pleasant and he found a large crowd gathered in the grove where merriment reigned supreme. A stranger among strangers he held aloof from the rest, until he was both surprised and pleased to see Rob, Tom and Jerry there.

"Hilloa!" greeted the first, "you didn't say you were coming over here."

“Neither did you,” replied Larry.

“Say, Rob, don’t Larry look fine in his new clothes? Where’d you get ’em, Larry?”

“Bought them with money of my own earnings,” retorted Larry, who was not disposed to do much talking even with his friends.

The truth was he had been on the watch for Lucy and Pluto Snyder, but they had not appeared, though it was already past the time set for the speaking, and he knew they were waiting for the “orator” up at the grand stand. Then he saw Mr. Howlitt arrive, and Lucy was with him, so that his wonder increased.

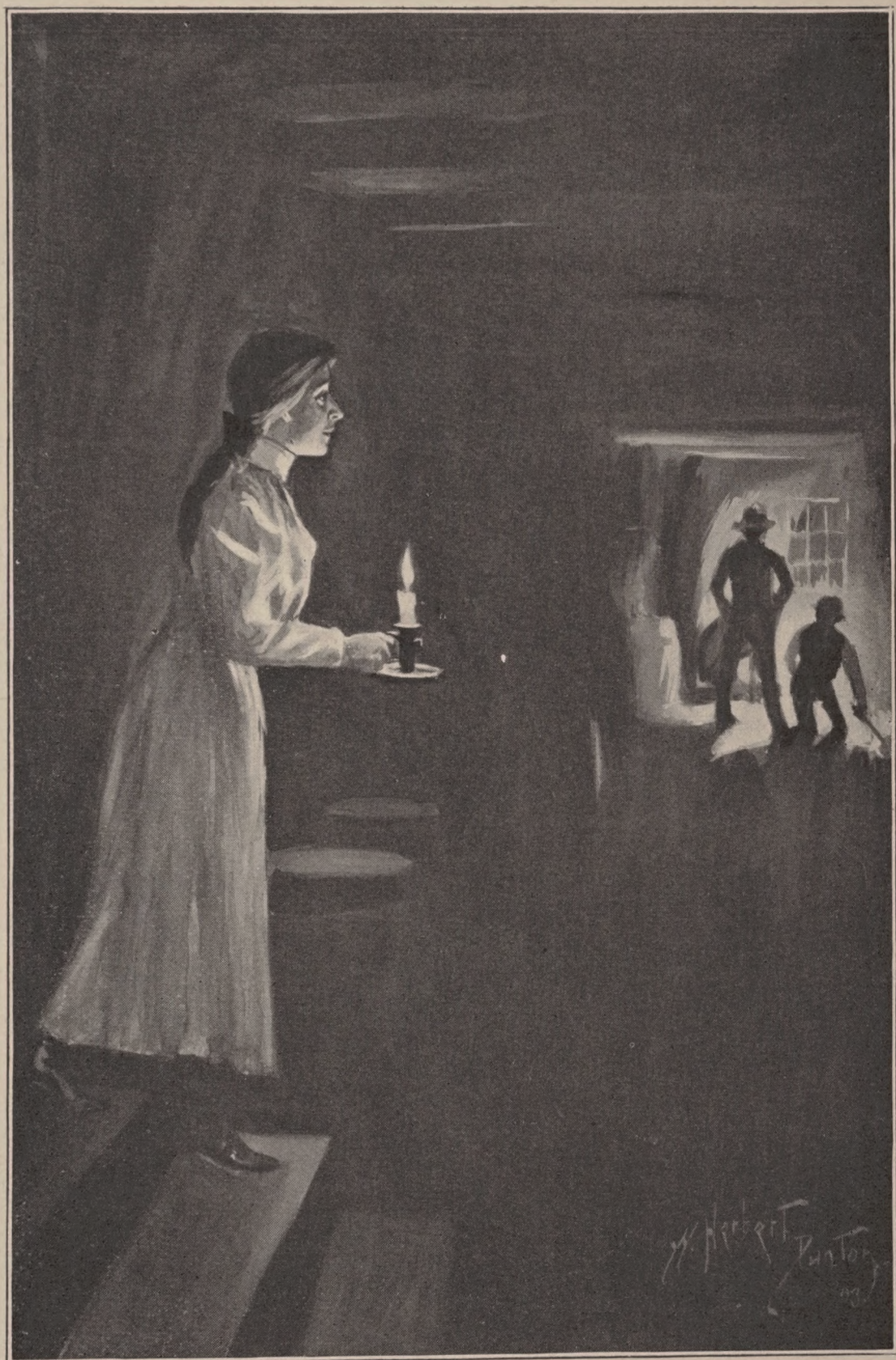
He was about to go and speak to her, when Job touched him on the arm, saying in a low tone:

“They want you up to the spouter’s stand.”

Larry was not more surprised at the words than he was to find that Job was present, as he had not expected him to come.

“What do you mean, Job?”

“Jess what I say, Larry. Pluck Snyder sent word by me that he can’t be here to-day, and he wants you to orate his speech fer him.”



What she now saw was a sight calculated to have sent a thrill of terror to the heart of a less brave girl.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

“STOP! THAT’S MY ORATION.”

To explain the appearance of Rob at the Fourth of July celebration in Gainsboro we shall have to go back to his meeting with the masked men on the summit of Flying Jump, where we left him just as he had flung aside two of his assailants to be fired on by others in concealment.

Knowing from the sounds that two or three were coming to the assistance of the two men he had for the moment baffled in their attack, Little Hickory felt that his only way of escape lay in flight.

Thus he quickly sprang into the saddle of his bicycle, and just as the men in front recovered

enough to renew their assault and those in the bushes burst into sight, he started down the steep grade at a tremendous velocity.

“Hi there! hold up or we will shoot ye!” cried the leader of the party.

But nothing was farther from the purpose of Little Hickory, even had it been possible for him to check his headlong flight at this juncture without deadly peril to himself.

The road was strewn with loose rocks and rent with deep gullies at places, but despite the awful peril constantly menacing his progress he kept on down Flying Jump at a rate of speed in keeping with its name.

Two of his enemies sent shots after him, but they flew over his head harmlessly, and the entire party stood as if riveted to their tracks while they watched the flight of their intended victim, expecting every moment to see him flung headfirst upon the rocks, where he would be an easy prey to them.

But Little Hickory had too clear a head and steady a nerve to fall in any such manner. It is true he was not an experienced bicyclist, but

what he lacked in experience he more than made up in fearless foresight and swiftness of action. Never for an instant "losing his head," he guided the wheel down the descent, around loose stones and boulders, along the very rim of gullies, down, faster and faster until he fairly flew into the valley, and carried on by the fearful momentum he had gained sped up the ascent on the opposite side.

By that time the amazed men awakened to the fact that their bird was fast leaving them, and with oaths of madness they rushed down the hill in pursuit.

It would be of no avail to fire shots now, as Little Hickory was beyond the range of their weapons.

By the time they had gained the foot of Flying Jump he was out of sight, having nearly gained the summit on the east, carried up half the rise on his bicycle, when he sprang lightly to the ground and continued his flight on foot.

"Curse him!" cried the leader of the masked men, "he'll get away from us. He must not."

"He's good's done it, 'cording to my figur-

ing," replied a panting companion. "Great Scot! how he winged it down the—"

"Fool! if you and Jed hadn't been sich blunders he'd been our game now."

"Don't get too sure on thet, old man. He's a whirlwind he is, and no man could a stopped him once he got started."

Little Hickory kept on home without seeing or hearing anything more of his enemies, and what became of them was likely to remain unknown.

He did not think it wise to speak of his adventure at home, as he knew it would only make those at the old house uneasy and afraid to remain there while he and Larry were away. So he greeted his mother with his usual light-heartedness, though it was many days before he fully recovered from the thrilling experience of coasting Flying Jump.

On the morning of the Fourth of July, it being a holiday, he resolved to take his first "day off" since coming to Break o' Day, and though he had no new suit to wear, as was the case with Larry, he brushed his old clothes up, put on a

new pair of trousers which he had been obliged to buy, and started on foot.

It had been his wish that Joe should go with him, but she declared that she could not think of that, as she had positively "nothing fit to wear." Besides she was needed at home.

Thus we find Rob at Gainsboro, and no one was more surprised than he at the declaration of Job Wescott to his friend Larry.

At this juncture one of the committee came hurriedly to the spot, saying:

"Are you the young man who is to take the place of Mr. Snyder, who was to speak here to-day? If so, come right along for the people are tired of waiting. It's strange Snyder could not have notified us of this arrangement before."

Larry was thus placed in a position he could not understand, and with the efforts of Job he was taken to the speaker's stand before he had fully recovered from his surprise. Then he looked around to find himself staring into the upturned faces of the crowd of amazed people.

"Reel it off, Larry, jess as you did to me down in the hayfield t'other day and you'll

s'prise 'em all—especially Lucy!” whispered Job, as he turned to go away. A moment later a few heard him say in a low tone to himself:

“If this don't make me even with Pluck Snyder I'll try ag'in!”

The chairman of the occasion by this time had arisen, and not knowing personally the expected speaker had begun to introduce the “orator” in glowing terms as “the gifted son of the rich Orestes Snyder, and the talented young lawyer of the silver tongue destined to make his mark in the world,” and much more in that line, until he ended and a breathless silence fell on the scene.

Was ever one in such a situation as Larry at that moment? One of the committee whispered for him to rise and begin, while others half-lifted him to his feet.

He did not have either the courage or the presence of mind to explain the mistake that had been made, even if he really understood that one had been made. He simply did what seemed the only thing for him to do. He began to repeat his stolen “oration.”

Larry's voice rang out loud and clear, so that he caught the attention of his listeners at the very outset. Then, all feeling of fear and hesitation leaving him, fairly forgetting himself in his efforts, he went on with the patriotic address ringing with eloquent expression and flamboyant descriptions.

It was evident that the good people of Gainsboro were being highly pleased, and Larry Little, the impromptu orator, was soaring high in one of Pluto Alexander Snyder's most labored periods, when that person's voice broke on the hushed scene like a note sadly out of tune:

“Here, you farm lunkhead! that's my oration. Stop, I say stop before I have you arrested for stealing—”

The rest was lost in the midst of the hubbub his words had created, while the irate speaker, fairly wild with anger and excitement, continued to push the crowd aside, while he rushed toward the platform.

It was a scene which made that Fourth of July at Gainsboro memorable.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“HIDE ME SOMEWHERE!”

“I tell you everybody says the old house is haunted, and only last night I heard awful cries and groans, so I didn’t dare to lay in bed till I went to sleep.”

Chick uttered these words, and his manner showed that he believed what he said. Then Aunt Vinnie joined in, for it must be supposed that this conversation was taking place at home.

“There, boy, that just agrees with what I’ve heerd. Only three nights ago I lay awake and listened to the most distracting cries you ever heerd. Seemed jess like a child crying when it begin, and then it sounded like a grown person, to end off with a terrible scream as if it were a ghost.”

“How do you know, Aunt Vinnie, that ghosts have such screams?” asked Joe, who was inclined to discredit the story.

“They say,” spoke up Chick, “that an awful murder was done here once. A man living here all alone was killed by another man working for him, and it was supposed that this man died here himself, for he was never seen afterwards.”

“Oh, nonsense, Chick,” said Mrs. Bayne, “you must not believe all you are told.”

“What everybody says must be so,” persisted Chick. “Ruddy has heard as much as I have, only he daresn’t tell of it.”

“I had darst to speak of it,” retorted the latter. “And I heard Bill Wythe say that he had been past here in the night when the house would be all lighted from cellar to garret and nobody was living here then either.”

“He just told you that to frighten you, Ruddy,” said Joe. “I have not seen anything strange since we have come here.”

“I have,” affirmed Ruddy. “Just Thursday night—”

"You didn't hear that Thursday night," interrupted Chick.

"I did."

"You didn't. You were fast asleep and snoring all the time, 'cos I prodded you—"

"I weren't asleep any more'n you were, Chick Nobody. I was just making believe to see what would be done."

"You lie, Ruddy from Nowhere," replied Chick. "And if you don't take back that name you called me I'll lick you."

"You can't, Nobody's Chicken, and you know it. I downed you only yesterday in the garden and—"

"I'll show you how you downed me!" cried the redoubtable Chick, catching hold of Ruddy.

"Stop, boys!" said Joe. "There is nothing to quarrel over. I wouldn't be so foolish."

"He don't sass me," muttered Chick, giving Ruddy a push which sent him reeling backward.

By this time the latter's anger was raised, and springing to his feet he rushed upon the other, when the twain closed in a furious struggle for

the mastery. In vain the older members of the group tried to part them.

“Oh, dearie me!” cried Aunt Vinnie, “’em boys will be the death and destruction of me. Here, Chick! here, Ruddy, do stop that fighting. Oh, Luddy! they pull their lights and livers right out’n their bodies. I’m thankful thet I was never a boy!”

Joe was about to interpose again, when she discovered some one coming up the road at a run.

“It’s Mary,” she declared. “It must be they have let her off from work this afternoon. How anxious she must be to get home the way she is coming.”

“She is crying,” said Mrs. Little. “Why, Mary, what has happened?” running forward to meet the girl who was coming toward the house as fast as she could run, her hair flying in the air and a wild, hunted look on her face.

“They are after me!” she cried. “Don’t let them get me! Don’t let them get me. I never did it! I never did it!”

Mary then fell into the outstretched arms of

her mother, where she lay without speaking but sobbing as if her heart would break.

“What is it, Mary? what is it, my child?” begged the mother. “Tell me the worst, Mary; if it be ever so bad I’ll not believe it.”

Joe and the others were now beside them, and doing what they could to soothe the weeping girl.

“Let’s get her into the house,” said Joe.

“Hide me somewhere!” implored Mary. “Don’t let ’em get me. I never stole the things.”

“Who said you stole?” asked the mother.

“Mrs. Cornhill and the rest. They claim they have been missing things right along since I have been there, but I never took a thing. I do not care what they say.”

“Don’t let that worry you, my child. We will not believe it, and they shall not touch you.”

“They will!” she panted. “The sheriff is after me now. I ran away from him and the others, but they are following me. I ran all the way up here.”

“I wish Rob was here,” said Joe, the tears

filling her eyes. "But they shan't take you away, Mary, if we can help it."

"You can't. Let me hide somewhere."

"You shall," cried her mother. "Come into the house."

The others followed the mother and her daughter, not knowing what to do or say.

"I do not believe they will come way up here after you," said Joe, more hopefully than she felt.

"They will. I heard 'Squire Hardy say that he would send every one of us to the jail or county farm inside of two weeks. And that boy of his shouted after me, and when I ran he gave chase. He overtook me, but when he tried to drag me back, or hold me until the sheriff got there, I pushed him over the bank and ran again."

"Did—did you kill him?" fairly gasped her mother.

"I don't know. Where can I hide?"

Confused and excited the others began to look about for some corner or place of concealment for the fugitive girl, without stopping to think

if it was right or wrong to do so, when Chick dashed into the house, crying:

“They are coming—right here—’Squire Hardy, Sheriff Stanyan, and two or three others!”

“We’re too late!” moaned Mrs. Little. “I will fight before they shall take her away.”

“You must not do that,” said Joe. “Then they would take you, too. Quick, mother, get Mary into the closet in my room, while I go out and stop them so they shall not come into the house.”

By the time the brave Joe had reached the door the officer and his companions were within a few yards of the house.

At sight of her they stopped, the sheriff saying:

“We want the girl who has been at work to Deacon Cornhill’s. If she will come out peacefully the rest of you will not be troubled.”

“At this time,” added ’Squire Hardy.

“What do you want of Mary Little?” asked Joe, showing very little fear as she spoke.

“I am not obliged to answer that, miss. Stand aside and let me come in.”

“This is our house, sir, and I do not know as I am obliged to let you come in until you have told me your errand.”

Joe was surprised herself at the calmness with which she spoke, and she stood at her post undaunted.

“I will show the little vixen who is who!” cried the infuriated sheriff. “Let me come in, girl, or I will—”

“Don't do anything rash, Stanyan,” admonished Hardy. “If we manage this right we can land the whole crowd in jail before night.”

CHAPTER XXV.

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS.

“Isn’t there another door?” asked the sheriff. “I do not care to meddle with this vixen if I can help it.”

“You had better not,” cried Joe, but her heart began to fail as she realized how helpless she was. She could only hope that the others had succeeded in secreting Mary so the officers could not find her. But if they did, what then?

The sheriff lost no time in seeking the side door, Squire Hardy and one of the men remaining in front, as if he was afraid to face the brave girl in the doorway alone.

“It will be better for the girl to come along peacefully,” he said.

But Joe made no reply, while she listened for sounds of what was taking place within the house.

Sheriff Stanyan did not gain an entrance until Mary had been concealed in a closet, but the frightened aspect of the little group in the room told the keen-eyed officer that he was on the right track.

“Where is the girl?” he demanded. “Oh, she need not think she can escape me. I saw her enter this house, and I will find her if we have to tear the old shell down. It is a fitting abode for such as you, and you may thank your stars that I am not after the whole of you.”

Mrs. Bayne tried to speak, but the words died away in a whisper, while Mrs. Little could only sob out her anguish.

At that moment Mr. Little, leaning heavily on his cane, entered the room. He had overheard enough to know what was causing the excitement, and facing the sheriff he said, defiantly:

“Our daughter a thief, never, sir! Begone from these premises, and never darken—”

“So you dare to offer resistance?” cried the officer. “Nothing suits me better than to snap these handcuffs on your wrists, which no doubt have felt their like before.”

The woman screamed, and Mr. Little in his righteous indignation ordered the sheriff to stand back. In the midst of the scene the door opened, and Mary Little stepped into the apartment, saying:

“Let them take me, father. It will be better so. I am not a thief, but it does not matter what they do with me.”

Tears and cries of pain followed, but they availed nothing. Eager to finish his work the officer took Mary Little by the arm and led her from the room, his associates covering his retreat.

“Don’t let them rob me of my child!” moaned the distracted mother, but her grief and her appeals fell on hearts of stone.

Joe Willet realized how futile had been their defence, as she saw the exultant party drive away with poor Mary in their midst, a prisoner charged with stealing from her employer.

At the same time Mary was being taken away by Sheriff Stanyan, Larry Little, without dreaming of the ill-fate which had overtaken his

sister, was the central figure in a scene of most peculiar and vivid interest.

The young orator paused suddenly in the midst of his speech, and at sight of Pluto Snyder the following words fled from his mind.

“Get down from there, you cow-headed—”

“Stop the fool!” cried some one directing his remarks against the new-comer rather than Larry.

A constable happening to stand near, and misunderstanding the real situation he seized upon poor Pluto and began to drag him from the scene. The more the hapless young Snyder struggled the firmer he was held in the grasp of the officer, who showed him no mercy, but pulled him away, while the crowd cheered him for his efforts.

In a moment the quiet was restored, but Larry stood dumb with dismay, and unable to know what to do.

“Go on!” cried Job Wescott. “The feller shan’t pester you any more.”

Others urged Larry to proceed, and like one taking a leap in the dark, he re-opened his

speech. The well-rounded period of the law-student gone from him, Larry was obliged to depend on himself. It was the best thing that could have happened to him. Fortunately, too, he selected a subject familiar to him, and in glowing language he pictured the lives of those lowly ones dwelling in the narrow streets and dark alleys of the great city who had never heard of a Fourth of July, much more tasted of its joys.

As he kept on Larry really waxed eloquent, and for more than twenty minutes he held his listeners' undivided attention. It was an address which is still talked over at Gainsboro. At its close a deafening applause, which lasted for several minutes, rang up and down the grove.

When he stepped down from the platform Larry was greeted by a circle of admirers, and as soon as she could reach his side Lucy came forward with her compliments which were worth more than all the other praise showered upon him. But he was too confused to speak intelligibly.

“It was all a mistake—a miserable mistake, and—”

At this juncture Pluto Snyder, having broken away from his captors, reached the spot, and boiling with rage he cried out:

“Let me get at the hoodlum! He stole my speech—he is a sneaking—”

Seeing Lucy standing by Larry he suddenly stopped his storm of abuse, saying in a milder tone:

“You here, Miss Lucy, in the company of such a scape-goat? Let us go home, and I will tell you of the miserable trick he played on me.”

Lucy Howlitt, to whom all this was a mystery, not liking the appearance of Mr. Snyder under his excitement, declined to go home with him, pleading that her father was waiting for her.

Thereupon the crest-fallen law-student went away in a high dudgeon using language neither becoming a gentleman or fitting to be spoken in the presence of a lady.

“Come, Lawrence,” said Lucy, “you will please ride home with papa and me. There is plenty of room, and I want to hear your expla-

nation of this affair. I did not dream you were capable of making such an address."

As she would not take no for an answer, and Mr. Howlitt joined his invitation with his daughter's, Larry could do no better than to accept. On the way home he showed his innate honesty by confessing to all he knew of the matter of the speech, which did not throw much light on the situation, though to his joy neither Mr. Howlitt nor Lucy blamed him.

"You say the last part was original with you?" said the last. "I think that was altogether the best, and I am proud of you, Lawrence."

"Pluto Snyder is a silly coxcomb," said her father, "and I am glad if he has been taken down a notch."

The next day Job Wescott acknowledged that he had caused young Snyder to miss coming to the celebration in season to address the meeting, and that his coming at all was simply because the one left in charge of Pluto had been bought off by the irate "orator."

"I'll l'arn him how to use offensive stuff at

me. I jess paid off an old debt, and Larry weren't a whit to blame. But, my gum! didn't he hum with madness. I tell ye ye never see what it is for one to be mad until ye hev seen a fool lose his temper."

Though the Howlitts were disposed to blame Job for the part he had taken, Larry rose in their estimation, and another's loss was his gain.

A little later Larry forgot all about his recent triumph by hearing of the fate which had befallen his sister, and he lost no time in going home to learn the whole truth.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FROM BAD TO WORSE.

The arrest of Mary Little for theft at Deacon Cornhill's was a bitter blow to her friends, none of whom could believe her guilty.

Rob lost no time in going to the Cornhill home, hoping that he could enlist the folks in his favor, or at least get at the truth of the matter. But he found Mrs. Cornhill fully convinced of Mary's guilt, and severely blaming herself that she had ever let the "idle hussy into the house."

It was in vain that Rob pleaded that Mary had been a faithful servant. The fact remained that Mrs. Cornhill had been missing article after article from the household ever since the

girl had come to work for her. She had not spoken of this at first, as she had been so favorably impressed by her that she had hesitated about accusing her of such misdoings. Finally, after watching and waiting for weeks, she had felt obliged to act in the matter.

Deacon Cornhill was now so far recovered from his recent illness as to sit up in his great easy chair, though he was but a shadow of his former genial self.

“Don’t be hard on the gal, Maria,” he said, compassionately. “No doubt she was driven to it. The articles were not worth very—”

“’Tweren’t the wurth but the principle in it,” snapped his wife. “Arter the way I treated her to hev the idle hussy turn on us just at this time of all others,” and the good woman fell to crying.

“Don’t break down, Maria,” said he, but his own voice was husky and Rob was sure there were tears in his eyes.

Mistaking the cause of this emotion Rob spoke more hopefully, when he learned that he and his

friends were not alone in their misfortunes, as disaster had overtaken this family. It proved that Deacon Cornhill had become responsible for large sums of money through another individual, and this person proving worthless, he was held for the full amount. When this should be paid practically every dollar would be swept away, and he and his family would be turned out of home, penniless.

“The earnings of two lives, my father’s and mine, are thus lost and Maria and I are homeless and friendless, for at this time, when we need our friends most, there is not one to speak a consoling word. I ennamost wish the fever had done its work, for I had rather been laid in my grave than to have lived to see this day.”

“Oh, Elihu! it is wicked to talk like that,” said his wife. “But it is dreadful to be robbed of our home at this time in life.”

Rob went away feeling that he was not alone in his misfortunes, and when he told the others at Break o’ Day good Deacon Cornhill had several sincere sympathizers, if they were helpless ones.

While the arrest of Mary, who was then in jail where she must remain until her trial nearly two months later, cast a gloom over the entire party they could do nothing for her.

Rob returned to work at Deacon Cornhill's, where he was greatly needed, every other hand having deserted him at this critical time on the ground that he could not pay them. As much as he needed his wages Little Hickory resolved to take his chances, pitying the unfortunate man in his distress and believing he would eventually pay him all that was due to him.

Larry remained at Mr. Howlitt's, probably the happiest of the entire number who had come to Basinburg.

So far, Tom and Jerry had not found situations, and had remained at home. But Rob secured a chance for them in a portable saw mill, where they went to work.

This was a severe "breaking in" for them, and more than once both were on the verge of throwing up their jobs. Probably the only thing that kept them at work was the fear that Little Hickory would send them back. Their

task was to take away the boards after they had been thrown from the carriage by the sawyer, and at times they had to hustle to keep the "run" clear. Not a night but found them glad to seek their rude bunks at an early hour, where they slept "like Turks," as the expression goes.

As the mill was located more than three miles from home, and stood in the midst of the timberlot, they did not go home oftener than once a week.

They boarded with the rest of the hands in the "shanty," but as there was not room enough for them there to sleep they had to make up "shake-downs" in the mill. As it was warm weather they rather liked this arrangement.

They were reasonably faithful to their employer, and everything appeared to be going on well, until one afternoon while the sawyer was crowding them uncommonly hard with boards they got behind so that the course got completely filled.

Now it is always easier to keep square with one's work than to catch up when time has been lost. The fault, such as it was, was really Tom's

as he had taken half an hour's rest, saying it would be an easy matter to clear the run.

But the time was lost and in vain they worked to recover what they had neglected to keep. The sawyer was a crusty old man who shouted angrily at them to clear the way. Unfortunately the boss happened along just then, and seeing the situation he ordered that another hand should be put on the work.

Tom resented this and answered back somewhat hastily. Bitter words followed, and almost before he knew it, Tom had lost his situation, and Jerry was frightened over the affair.

It was then nearly night, and having a dread of going home, Tom resolved to remain with his brother until morning, intending then to acknowledge his fault and beg of the boss to be allowed to return to his post. Had he done this then and there it would have saved him an ordeal of which he little dreamed.

It could not have been far from midnight, as he was tossing uneasily on his rough couch, while he pondered upon his recent mistake, when he heard some one moving about the mill.

Then he discovered two youths a little older than himself sneaking cautiously about the premises.

One of this couple carried a lighted torch in his hand, which he kept moving to and fro as he led his companion over the place.

“Look out, Phil,” said the latter, “or you will set the old shell on fire.”

“Sho! this wouldn't burn it's so green,” and as if to prove his words he thrust the burning brand into the midst of a pile of combustible matter. To his dismay the dried material instantly ignited, and the flames sprang upward with a suddenness and fury that frightened the new-comers.

“You have set the mill on fire!” gasped the other.

“Quick!” exclaimed he who had done the mischief, dropping the torch in his terror, “run for your life, Nate. We must not be found here.”

By this time Tom had sprung from his couch, but he was too late to stop the runaway boys, though he did reach the scene of the fire and just

picked up the smouldering torch as one of the mill-men, who had been attracted hither by its light appeared on the scene.

“Here, you little devil!” he roared. “Trying to burn up the mill are you? It’s lucky I have caught you at your devilish work.”

Tom was powerless to flee, if he had wished to, and in a moment he found himself flung to the floor by a pair of strong arms, and just as his brother reached the spot he was tied hands and feet.

Jerry was then seized and treated in the same manner.

Though others came speedily to the scene the fire had gained such a headway in the short time that the mill was burned down in spite of all that could be done to save it.

In vain Tom and Jerry pleaded their innocence. The last had not seen the two boys prowling about the place, and Tom’s story was ridiculed until he held his tongue in bitter silence. His quarrel with the boss of the previous afternoon was retold, and with the hatred of their former associates raised against them the hap-

less brothers were taken as prisoners on the serious charge of incendiarism.

“That’s good for twenty years apiece,” said ‘Squire Hardy, rubbing his hands in a pleased manner. “We’re picking them off one by one, and now the deacon has got shut off, the work will be easier.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

“IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS.”

The misfortune which had fallen upon Tom and Jerry was a terrible blow to those at Break o'Day. This seemed but the precursor of even worse troubles to follow.

Aunt Vinnie was distracted, and the rest had all they could do to keep her from going to see “her boys,” as useless as would have been such a course.

Rob and Joe, the bravest of the little party, did all they could to soothe the sorrow of their friends, trying to solace them with the hopeless thought that it is always darkest just before dawn.

“Do not give up,” said Rob. “Larry and I are earning wages, and we will hope that Tom

and Jerry and Mary will be set free when their trials come. Mrs. Cornhill only yesterday seemed very sorry that she had proceeded against Mary."

"But my boys! how can you save them? Ah, it was the sorriest day of my life when we left the city, with all its wickedness for this friendless wilderness where everybody is against us!"

"Not all of them, Auntie," said Joe. "Let us not give up."

Deacon Cornhill's affairs were rapidly growing worse, and the poor man seemed to be failing in strength, as if the ordeal was more than he could stand. Mrs. Cornhill grew fretful and more than once she accused Rob of bringing the trouble upon them.

"It came with you," she repeated. "If the deacon had not provoked 'Squire Hardy by bringing you and your friends to Break o' Day he would never have done what he has against us, and I firmly believe he is at the root of this evil."

Rob would attempt no reply to this rather contradictory speech, but kept on at his work, re-

solving to be faithful to his benefactor let the result be what it might.

About ten days after the arrest of Tom and Jerry, as Rob was down to the village on business for the deacon, he found that everybody there was wildly excited over a robbery that had been committed the night before, the store and post-office having been broken into by burglars and considerable money and property stolen.

A crowd of men gathered on the piazza, conspicuous among whom was 'Squire Hardy, were arguing the matter pro and con, as Rob drew near.

"Sam Sawyer is ready to swear on the witness stand," the 'squire was saying, "that the man he discovered climbing out of the store window last night, and who was one of the burglars, if there was more than one, was the same man he met yesterday afternoon on the Hare road, and who inquired the way to Mount Riga, which was the name once given to Break o' Day."

"Didn't Sam give the name of this stranger?" asked a bystander.

“He did, and that is the best part of it. He said he was one Gideon Bayne, and that he lived in town here when he was a small boy, but thought perhaps people had forgotten him now, as he had forgotten the country.”

“Bayne?” half queried, half exclaimed another, as if the name was one that he vaguely recalled. “Wasn’t that old miser’s name Bayne, who lived and died at the old red house when such a flurry was raised hereabouts?”

“Just that—Timothy Bayne. Folks thought he was killed by his hired man, but neither could be found when they come to look for ’em. They were a hard crowd.”

“But old Tim Bayne had neither chick nor child, living all alone.”

“That does not hinder him from having thieving relatives, running around the country breaking into stores and post-offices, does it?”

“But Tim Bayne owned all of that quarter of the town when he died, though I can’t say it was very valuable.”

“Just so, and there being no one to claim it when he died or disappeared—I never thought

the man was dead—the Cornhills got the whole of it for a mere song. But it hasn't done the deacon much good. Ill-gotten gains never do," added the 'squire, aiming to be philosophical.

"I don't quite recall any other Bayne in town in them days," declared an old resident, "though my memory doesn't often go back on me."

"That may be, but it doesn't require much memory to recall the fag-end Bayne that we have with us now," remarked 'Squire Hardy, who had just seen Rob, who had stopped at the outside of the party. "Say, youngster, wasn't your father Gid Bayne?"

The question was so unexpected, the situation so ominous to him in its outcome, that Little Hickory had hard work to command his feelings. As it was he feared a moment later that he had betrayed himself by his looks.

"I have just come, sir, and I do not know what you mean."

"Calculate you'd know if you wanted to. There is no doubt you belong to the same breed of cats, for there was never but one family by

that name. By — —, it is a mighty apt one too. I don't see why Stanyan don't come. If I was sheriff I'd manage to be on hand once in my life."

Rob thought it good policy for him to withdraw from the company, but he had not taken half a dozen steps before the 'squire thundered at him:

"You stop where you are, Rob Bayne. We are going up to your place as soon as the sheriff gets here, and we want you to go with us."

"What errand can you have at our home, sir?" demanded Little Hickory, with flashing eyes, having recovered his usual self-possession.

"Your stupid head is thicker than I think if you do not know already. If you do not know it may save you a short time of the bitter dose you are going to take. Here comes Stanyan, and there is no need to delay longer."

The sheriff was indeed driving up to the place, and the 'squire immediately ordered his team to be brought in front of the store.

"Here is the chip-of-the-old-block Bayne," declared Hardy, waving his hand toward Rob.

"I thought it would be a good thing to take him right along."

"A capital idea," replied the officer. "Jump in here with me, young man, and, mind you, no monkeying about this."

Rob's first thought was to refuse to go, but fortunately a wiser judgment decided him, and he entered the sheriff's wagon, saying:

"I do not understand what you want of me, but I am willing to go, for I have done no wrong."

"That remains to be seen," retorted the officer, sharply, and a moment later he started in the direction of Break o' Day, with the 'squire close behind him, while as many as a dozen teams followed the latter.

Rob's mind was deeply impressed with the evil about to fall upon him and his friends, but he could not see clearly its nature. He could not realize that his father, after all the years that he had been away, had appeared in this country town, making his coming more tragical by being concerned in the recent robbery. As yet he could

not believe his father had sunk so low as to become a common house-breaker.

As they came in sight of his home Rob caught sight of his mother at one of the windows, but she quickly disappeared.

“Look out sharp for the youngster, Hardy,” called out the sheriff. “I will look after our man inside, while the rest of you,” addressing his companions, “surround the house and see that the dog does not escape. Remember, you will be justified in shooting him if he offers resistance.”

Having given this command, Mr. Stanyan started toward the door.

It was opened by Mrs. Little, who asked:

“What is wanted?”

“We want *him!*” exclaimed the officer. “I am the sheriff, so stand aside for the law.”

“There is nobody here that you can want, sir. We are honest—”

“We are after Gid Bayne, and we know he is hiding here. If he'll give up peacefully we'll not hurt the rest of you.”

“Who said he was here?” asked the fright-

ened woman, and through that question the hopes of Rob fell like lead. *His father was there!*

“I do!” thundered the sheriff, and Mrs. Little retreated before his terrific appearance.

How Little Hickory chafed at his own helplessness, and catching sight of his mother at that moment, he cried to her:

“Do not let them frighten you, mother. They cannot harm you.”

“What do you accuse my husband of now?” she demanded of the officer, bravely facing the other.

“Of breaking and entering the store and post-office of Basinburg.”

“He is innocent, sir.”

“Bah! who heeds the words of such as you? It will prove a sweet job for him when we catch him. Where is he?”

“That remains for you to say, and not me, sir. I am only a defenceless woman, but it will be a sorry hour if you harm me.”

With these spirited words she stepped aside, allowing the officer and his followers to enter.

A furious search followed, when the old house was ransacked from cellar to garret. Every corner and niche imaginable was searched, the sheriff sparing neither time nor the building, but look where and how he would he could find no trace of the fugitive.

Finally, his dark features livid with rage, he joined 'Squire Hardy, giving expression to words unfit to repeat here.

"He must have got wind of our coming and run away," declared the 'squire. "But if so, we can and must find him, Stanyan."

"You can bet your bottom dollar that I will find him if I have to move heaven and earth to do it," replied the sheriff. "More than that, I will take the boy here with us, and if he doesn't get a place to hang his hat for the next ten years I'll resign my office."

Then the party prepared to drive away, with Little Hickory a prisoner among them.

Seeing what was being done, Mrs. Bayne rushed out of the house, crying in her despair:

"Oh, sir! don't take my boy. He has done

nothing but what is right. His father had rather—”

“Stop, mother!” cried Little Hickory, sternly. “Say nothing you may repent of later. I go without resistance, and you must keep up good courage here until I get back.”

’Squire Hardy looked back at the weeping spectators they were leaving behind with a mocking laugh.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SKELETON IN THE CELLAR.

Mrs. Bayne was wild with grief as she saw Rob taken away in this heartless way.

“This is the worst blow yet,” she moaned. “Oh, why have they taken my boy, our support?”

“And my poor Mary!” cried Mrs. Little.

“And my boys, Tom and Jerry,” added Aunt Vinnie.

It was a hopeless group, and Joe, the only one among them who could look bravely up had all she could do to try and console them.

“Let us hope for the best,” she said. “They cannot harm Rob. He has surely done no wrong.”

“But we are so helpless,” said Mr. Little. “That infernal—”

“Hush—hush!” spoke up Joe. “You must

be careful how you speak. We can only hope and wait."

"Oh, that Gideon should come home at this time and under such conditions as these," moaned the distracted wife.

"Don't condemn him, said Joe, courageously. "We know all others are innocent, and we will think he is until we know differently."

"He says he is not guilty of this terrible thing. But what will become of us? We are so helpless."

"We must not give up," said Joe. "I wonder what they will do with Rob. I've a mind to go to the village."

"Go, Joe. We can take care of ourselves."

"I think you had better," assented Mr. Little. "How I wish that I was well again. It is so hard to suffer and do nothing when one is so needed."

"But you are so much better than in the city," said Mrs. Little. "It is that alone which keeps me from wishing that I was back to the city once more."

Having decided to go to Basinburg, Joe lost

no more time in making such preparations as she could for the visit, having really no idea of what good it could do. She hoped to find out what would be done with Rob, and that was incentive enough.

She was ready to start in less than five minutes. She had very little change to make in her apparel for the reason that, despite the desires of Rob, she had not allowed much to be bought for her. She did have a new print dress, a pair of shoes, and a straw hat. These she put on in place of her everyday clothes, and, bidding the others to be of good cheer until she returned, she started on a run toward the village.

So rapidly did she go that inside of half an hour she came in sight of the village.

The crowd about the store was larger than when Rob had been there, and the excitement was running higher than ever. She learned that Rob had been put under close surveillance, and that the sheriff and his posse were searching for Gideon Bayne.

At first nobody seemed to notice her, and then she began to attract attention, when sneering

remarks were made in regard to her, and she heard several suggest that it would be the proper thing to arrest her as one of a gang of outlaws and public enemies.

She did not mind this as much as she would have done under ordinary circumstances. In her anxiety to learn what she could of Rob she dared much, ay, jeopardized her own safety.

When she had regained confidence she learned that no harm would be done him until another day, when he would be given a justice trial, before being taken to jail.

Determined to be present, she started homeward, happily unconscious that it had already been decided to arrest her, though she was not followed to her home.

Incidentally she had learned that Deacon Cornhill had been demanded to meet his liabilities, and that he was about to sign over all his property to satisfy his creditors.

These things were among those she told to her anxious friends at home, whom she found anxiously awaiting her coming.

No new development had taken place since

her departure, except that two or three men had been seen hovering about the house, whom it was thought were spies who had been left by Sheriff Stanyan.

So the occupants of the old red house saw the shades of night fall with dire misgivings.

To make their situation more gloomy, threatenings of a storm appeared, and the wind moaned dismally through the trees overhanging the back side of the building.

"I shall go crazy," declared Aunt Vinnie.

At that moment Chick and Ruddy, their faces white with terror, burst into the room, exclaiming:

"We have heard it ag'in! There are ghosts, and they are crying and moaning 'Murder! Murder!'"

This announcement, given at this time, sent a thrill of horror through the frames of the little group, the most of whom shivered and remained silent.

"Nonsense, Chick," said Joe. "You were frightened and imagined you heard such sounds."

“Come up into the back chamber if you think we lie, Joe. I—”

A peal of thunder caused the frightened Chick to stop in the midst of his speech, while he crept nearer the others.

The first alarm of the rising storm was quickly followed by another flash of lightning and a second peal of thunder, louder and nearer than the first.

Soon after the rain began to fall, while the lightning and the thunder gradually passed over, but not until it seemed as if the old house would be destroyed.

When the fury of the storm was beginning to wane the little party of frightened people slowly gained courage.

“It must be leaking into the chambers,” said Joe. “I will get one or two of those old buckets in the cellar and put them under the worst places.”

“Oh, don’t dare to move,” admonished Aunt Vinnie. “This is awful.”

Not to be deterred from her purpose, Joe lighted the stump of a candle, and carefully de-

scended the old stairs leading the damp, musty cellar. But she had not gone far before she was startled to find a light already in the dismal place.

At first she thought the house must be on fire, but a second look showed her that the glare came from a lantern, and in a moment she was alert for what might be discovered.

Concealing her own light behind her, instead of crying out or beating a hasty retreat, she descended the stair more stealthily than before until she could command a full view of the cellar.

What she now saw was a sight calculated to have sent a thrill of terror to the heart of a less brave girl.

Three men were near the farthest corner, one of them holding the lantern, while another was digging hurriedly into the earth, the third seeming to have no other occupation than to watch the work of his laboring companion.

“Hark!” he exclaimed suddenly, “I thought I heard some one move.”

“Bosh!” said the one with the lantern. “I

never see you so nervous, Jed, as you are to-night. It was only one of the trees scraping ag'inst the roof of the old house."

"I guess you'd be nervous if you were in my place. A man's mind plays the deuce with him sometimes. I ain't forgot—"

"So does his tongue," interrupted the other. "The—ha! you have reached it, Bill."

Joe could hear the spade strike something which gave back a hollow, metallic sound that sent a shiver through her body, but she bravely stood her ground.

The man with the spade resumed his work, throwing up the earth faster than before, until suddenly he stopped. He peered closer into the pit he had dug.

"Hold the lantern lower, Bill."

The other quickly obeyed, when the one who had made the request gave expression to a low cry of dismay.

He holding the light now looked sharper down into the ground, when he exclaimed:

"Great heavens! it is a human skeleton! What does this mean, Jed?"

Then the trembling man called by this name glanced downward, to start back with a wild cry of fear.

“I made a mistake, boys. I—I—”

He started to flee without finishing his sentence.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“I AM GIDEON BAYNE.”

Before Joe could realize just what was taking place, and the terrified man had not taken his second step, a section of the big chimney which had been builded from the bottom of the cellar was violently torn down, and from out of the midst of flying brick and debris stood the figure of a man.

Seen by the dim lantern light he appeared like a giant in stature, while in either hand he held a cocked revolver, one weapon leveled at the fleeing miscreant, while the other was pointed toward his confederates, while his stentorian voice, sounding uncommonly loud and clear in that underground room, commanded:

“Hold! another step and I will measure the earth with your foul body!”

"I'm lost!" cried the frightened fugitive, falling upon his knees. "It's the ghost of Tim Bayne!"

It was little wonder if the man's companions stood trembling with fear, and that Joe Willet, brave girl that she was, nearly fainted.

Slowly advancing from the cloud of dust and dirt which had enveloped his form, the man with the deadly weapons continued:

"I have caught you in your own trap. The man who lifts a finger dies like a dog. It would be a blessing to mankind if I should send these bullets through your worthless bodies."

"Oh, spare me, spare me!" begged the wretch upon his knees. "I did not want to come here, but they made me. It was the buried treasure that did it. We were going away as soon as we had got that."

A commotion which had been suddenly started overhead at that moment arrested the attention of the other. Besides loud voices could be heard the tramp of many feet, so that it seemed as if a large party of men had forced an entrance into the house.

Joe had heard this sudden outbreak above, and it instantly occurred to her that the sheriff and his posse had returned.

But the peril, as great as it was, seemed to arouse her to swift action. Though the man who was holding the desperadoes at bay was unknown to her, he was proving himself an enemy to the night marauders, and this fact told her that she could look to him for friendship.

In this dilemma she boldly addressed him, who showed no surprise at her words.

"I need your assistance," he said. "Get me some strong cord or rope so I may secure my birds. After that we will look further."

"I will get you a rope in a minute," replied Joe, starting up the stairs.

It was prudent that she should move cautiously, expecting as she did that she was to find enemies in the house. But she had barely reached the top of the stairs before the well-known voice of Little Hickory came to her ears, sending a thrill of joy to her heart.

"Where is Joe?" he asked.

“Here!” she replied, bursting into the room, and regardless of the others present she threw herself into his arms, sobbing:

“I am so glad you have come, Rob.”

“I hope nothing more has happened here to harm you, Joe. Dr. Menter got home this evening, and upon hearing of my predicament he would not rest until he had seen me. Then he called 'Squire Hardy out of his bed, and demanded my release in such terms that I was given up at once. But he has come with us. Thank him, Joe, for what we owe to him.”

Joe now saw that the genial doctor was present, and he stepped forward to grasp her hand. She also saw Larry, who was clasped in his mother's arms. Beside this twain there were others present, whom she did not recognize in her joy, while she murmured her thanks to Dr. Menter for the kind assistance he had given Rob.

“I am his debtor still,” replied the physician. “I am glad I got home as I did. I wish I had been here before, for I might have saved you much suffering.”

Then Joe acted very queerly, as it seemed to the others, for she suddenly sprang back, saying:

“Oh, the man in the cellar! I forgot him. You must go to his help, Rob, with a rope.”

In a few hurried words she explained the startling tableau being enacted below them, when Rob and the men with him started to see what could be done, while the women stood together in a group, half in tears and half in fright over the strange situation.

No change had taken place in the cellar, for the unknown man held his victims at bay, not one had dared to move. The lantern had dropped from the hand of him called Bill, but it had not been extinguished.

“They are a string of precious scamps with a good price set on their heads; tie them fast and firm.”

Willing hands did this, and, though the baffled outlaws raved and cursed, begged and implored, they were soon prisoners.

“We came in the nick of time,” said Dr. Menter, “and though I do not understand fully what

this move means, I feel certain it is going to work in your favor, Robert. Ha! what means this skeleton here in the ground? I believe we are about to get at the mystery of the old red house."

"You are," said the stranger, who had put aside his revolvers, and having brushed the dirt from his clothes stood before the rest a fine specimen of manhood. "I think I can give you the key. But let us go above, as I have matters of closer interest to me that I want to speak of first.

"Rob, though you have grown so I should not have recognized you if your name had not been spoken, I am Gideon Bayne, *your father!*"

CHAPTER XXX.

RIGHT TRIUMPHS IN THE END.

It was not until he had been folded in the arms of his new-found father that Little Hickory could realize the truth of what had been spoken.

They had reached the first floor now, and his mother was close beside them, while the others stood apart, silent but appreciative spectators.

"I am so glad," murmured Mrs. Bayne. "Your father did come yesterday, though I have not had the opportunity to tell you. It seems strange he has come here, yet natural that he should. Then the officers came, and knowing he was again a hunted man he concealed himself in the opening made in the old chimney for that very purpose by his eccentric uncle, Timothy Bayne."

"What your mother says is true, my son," said the father. "At last I am free from the

law, and no longer a fugitive. I sought for you and your mother in the big city till I was forced to give up. Then I came here simply because Uncle Tim lived here when I was a boy, and I was naturally attracted hither. I reached the village in the night, to see these miscreants here just as they left the store on their depredation. It proved that I was watched, and instead of hunting for the real culprits I was again made a fugitive. But I did not know this until I had reached here.

“You may judge of my surprise and pleasure at finding your mother here.”

The others were deeply moved by this simple story of a man who had been more wronged than guilty. He was still in the prime of life, with a stalwart form, clear eyes and fearless manner.

“Now that I have found you,” he resumed, “I mean to stay by you, unless you drive me away, or the law does. At any rate, I shall consider myself a fugitive no longer.”

“Neither are you,” spoke up Dr. Menter. “If I mistake not these men in captivity here have

a story to tell which will lift much of the cloud that hangs over you. At any rate, I am not going to let Rob remain any longer the victim of a man who has persecuted him out of a matter of a little spite against another."

"You are very kind," replied Rob.

"Not half as kind, nor one-hundredth part as brave, as you were when you staked your life to save my dear boy and girl."

"This is a happy moment," said Aunt Vinnie, "and if my boys were only here I could enjoy it with the rest of you."

"And my Mary," said Mrs. Little.

"Mary will be with us again before another night," spoke up Larry. "Only this evening I learned of a strange thing, and I was coming to tell you of it. Lucy Howlitt was up to Deacon Cornhill's this afternoon, and Mrs. Cornhill told how Mary, as she thought, had been taking things, and it wasn't half an hour afterward that Lucy caught a tame crow belonging there carrying off a silver spoon in its bill. She called Mrs. Cornhill, and they watched the crow go straight to a place where he hid all of the things

that had been lost. Then Mrs. Cornhill knew that the crow and not Mary had stolen what she had missed, and she cried, she felt so bad over it.

“That will set Mary free, and Mrs. Cornhill is willing to do anything she can to be forgiven.”

“I am so glad,” murmured the mother. “I knew my daughter could not be guilty of such a thing as stealing.”

“It looks as though we were coming out all right,” said Rob.

“So you are, my boy,” said the doctor. “Right always triumphs in the end. I had rather be in your place than 'Squire Hardy's by a big difference. Now listen, Aunt Vinnie, for I have a bit of news that will give you joy as well as the others.

“The boy who was out on a night's lark with Phil Hardy has confessed that he and Phil were at the saw-mill the night it burned, and that young Hardy set it on fire. Of course Phil denies it, but it is a crushing blow for the Hardys, and it will save your boys from jail.”

“Hurrah!” cried Aunt Vinnie, shaking her

apron in the air, "this is the happiest moment of my life, or will be when I clasp my boys once more in my arms. I did not never see anything like this," getting her language somewhat twisted, but her heart was all right and the others felt as joyous as she did.

Leaving the inmates of the old red house to enjoy their new peace of mind, and to anticipate the happiness of the coming day, Dr. Menter looked to the safety of their prisoners.

When he had seen that they were still secure, he called Rob to one side, saying:

"While our friends here stand guard over the captives, how would it do for you and me to do a little investigating on our own hook?"

Little Hickory and his father willingly assented, when the three returned to the cellar.

"I thought it might be as well to keep our business to ourselves in part," said the doctor, as soon as they were alone. "I have reason to think that we are about to make important discoveries."

"I do not think it good policy to say so now to everyone, but I am ready to say to you that

one of those precious fellows upstairs is the murderer of Timothy Bayne. They have said enough to let us know that they were here after a buried treasure. Do you know anything about this, Mr. Bayne?"

"Only that uncle was supposed to be very wealthy, but eccentric. He was killed for his money, as it was supposed, by a man who had been working for him. I am sure the ruffian upstairs is the man. Whether he got uncle's money is more than I know. They were seeking for something of the kind here to-night."

"Well, we will do a little digging ourselves."

Mr. Bayne then took the shovel, but only the skeleton mentioned before was divulged to their sights. Nothing more.

"It is probably that of Mr. Bayne," said the doctor. "I do not believe we had better dig any more, and we will leave the bones just as we found them."

"I thought the shovel struck something that was not a rock. Let me take it," said Little Hickory.

Beginning to dig a little to one side of the ex-

posed skeleton, he soon unearthed an iron box of considerable size, and which proved to be of great weight.

With what feelings the three raised the box to the cellar floor may be imagined.

"It is the buried treasure of Timothy Bayne," said Rob in a low tone. "How firm the box is made."

"Hold, my son," said his father. "This treasure, if it shall prove such, has been found on the property of another man. It is not ours."

"By as good a right, and better, than any one's else," said Dr. Menter. "This property is now in the hands of Deacon Cornhill, who came into possession by a collector's deed, it being sold for taxes some eighteen or nineteen years ago. A deed of this kind is open to contest for twenty years. So as heir to Timothy Bayne it looks to me as if you could hold the treasure. But here we are arguing over what may be a valueless thing. Then, too, the deacon is an honest man, and will not try to hold what does not belong to him."

It was decided not to open the box until

another day and further investigation had been made, so the three returned to those who were anxiously awaiting them in the room above.

The outsiders were not told of the discovery that had been made, but the inmates of the house listened to the description of the find with unbounded interest.

Never was morning waited for more eagerly than by the party here, and as its first rosy light appeared, the harbinger of a fair and a happy day, Dr. Menter started for the village, taking one of the men with him. In a few hours Sheriff Stanyan came, but he brought no terror to the members of Ragged Rob's young republic.

He spoke graciously to them, complimented Rob on his good fortune.

"The 'Squire is pretty badly cut up over Phil, and well he should be, for he is a bad boy. It will take a good slice of the old man's property to settle the matter, but I do not think Phil will have to go to jail."

With these words the sheriff took away the sullen prisoners from the red house, leaving the others in easier spirits.

Half an hour later Dr. Menter returned accompanied by Deacon Cornhill, who greeted his colonists with great affection.

“The light is breaking,” he said, gladly, “and you are coming out all right, thanks to Rob here.”

“Not more to me than to our friends,” said Little Hickory.

The deacon had aged in appearance more than ten years since the others had last seen him, and the hearts of all went out to the kind-hearted man, who had done so much for them and had himself suffered so much.

But the moment of darkness was already fleeting, and a new light was coming into their lives.

The iron-bound box was soon broken into, and the over-joyed spectators beheld a sight which made them fairly wild with strange visions of joy and of mystery.

It was a treasure box indeed.

Made up of bank-notes, government bonds, gold and silver, it held the equivalent of over fifty thousand dollars!

Is it a wonder that there was dancing and wild exclamations?

The more sober of the party could not realize it as true, while the others did not try to.

At last, when something like rational feelings again held sway, Rob suggested that it belonged to Deacon Cornhill, but he would not admit it. But there was a happy compromise.

Little Hickory proposed that a portion go to him, and this under consideration of his difficulties he accepted with tears in his eyes and blessings upon his lips.

So the hoardings of Timothy Bayne at last came to do much good. It cleared Deacon Cornhill from his debts. It placed the members of Rob's young republic all in comfortable circumstances, for it was the wish of him and his father and mother that it should be shared among all alike.

What followed can be imagined.

First of all, Mary Little, and Tom and Jerry were restored to home. The prisoners were given a trial at which it was shown that one of them was the murderer of Timothy Bayne, and

that he had buried the miser's body in the cellar. He had afterwards gained a clue to the treasure buried in the cellar near where he had made the grave of his victim. He was induced to accompany his companions to dig for the treasure. The result is known. He and his pals were the ones who had robbed the store and postoffice, also the masked men who had tried to rob Rob on Flying Jump. They were sentenced as their crimes demanded, and the public felt safer.

Phil Hardy, as Dr. Menter had said, escaped the jail. It was evident he had not really intended to set fire to the mill, and the mill-owner was more willing to receive pay for his property than to see the boy go to prison. It was a good lesson to Phil. Nor was it lost on his father, who afterwards treated Rob and his friends as they deserved.

In fact the families of Break o' Day were now looked upon as equals of any others in town. Rob knew this came about largely from the fact that they were among the richest now, but he did not mind that, having resolved to merit the good bestowed upon him.

Three new houses were built that fall on Break o' Day, so it was a busy season. They had decided to live there, though the village people had hoped they would come into town.

Then followed plans for the future. As ours is a story of to-day these cannot be followed to any great extent. Mr. Bayne and his happy wife live in a comfortable home, eagerly waiting to welcome their son home from college, while Mrs. Willet, quite recovered from former illness, lives with them, waiting, too, for a daughter to graduate, when the two young people expect to join their fortunes in married life.

There will be another marriage at the same time, when happy Larry Little will wed sweet Lucy Howlitt, and go to her home to live. Larry is destined to be a prominent citizen of Basinburg, and the coming Fourth he is to deliver the oration at Gainsboro, without having to borrow anything from that consummate snob and worthless fellow, Pluto Snyder.

The other boys and girls of Break o' Day are also finishing their education, for they believe in acquiring such knowledge as they can to help

them in after life. I do not know what their plans are, but I do know that Rob intends to begin the study of medicine with Dr. Menter, and when next I go to Basinburg I expect to find him the regular physician there.

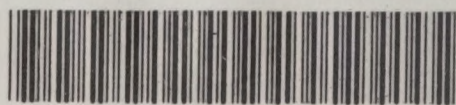
Deacon Cornhill has fully recovered his old-time spirits, and happy in the good work that he was instrumental in bringing about he is honored and respected in Basinburg, and everywhere he is known, while he never tires of telling the story of his visit to "the big, wicked city, where houses are built edgewise and men live under the streets."

I do not think I have left anything unsaid which cannot be readily understood. Of course the strange sounds heard at the old house were not of a supernatural origin, unless the branch of a tree moved by the wind so as to scrape on the roof of the dwelling could be called such.

THE END.

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